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GIFT COMICS

BY RICK WEINGROFF

Unlike modern comic publishers, the companies of the forties were always striving to outshine their competitors. While DC is content to let Marvel run its course, the companies of the past were fiercely competitive. The sense of competition sometimes took the form of various promotional stunts - for instance, Victor S. Fox's short-lived Blue Beetle radio show. Often, imitation was the way in which old-time publishers attempted to draw the spotlight from thier publishers; Captain Marvel imitated Superman, Capt. America's imitation of Batman and many other similar instances of legalized plaigarism are well known in fandom. A third way in which publishers competed was by changing the size of comic books. Apparently believing that multi-sized issues would attract the attention of the comic buying public, the various publishers, mainly without great success, attempted to produce lines of over and under sized comics; Harvey, for instance, published its line of pocket-sized comics.

However, the publisher who seemed most interested in changing the size of comics was Fawcett Publications; this company probably produced more different sized comics than any other company. One of the earliest efforts was NICKEL COMICS which was the length and width of contemporary comic magazines but had half as many pages and sold for only a nickel. This company also published the first several issues of MASTER COMICS as tabloid-sized, fifty-two page comics; and the company's "DIME ACTION NOVELS" were undersized, more like big-little books than comics in that they featured as much text as illustrations and were of the same general size.

These "Dime Action Novels" bring up a point which was particularly noticeable in the early Fawcett line. The company seemed to have a penchant for publishing thick editions; the Dime Novels had 192 pages. But perhaps the largest publication in terms of page number which was published by Fawcett was that company's attempt to attract the Christmas market. Fawcett printed several large comics, HOLIDAY, XMAS, and GIFT COMICS. Each, published in December, featured reprints of Various Fawcett comics and contained a number of pages which was enough to stagger the mind of any who might come in contact with the books; HOLIDAY COMICS had only 196 pages but XMAS and GIFT were each a hefty 324 pages in length.

This last named comic is worthy of discussion partially because the contents were representative of the titles being published by Fawcett at the time and partially because any comic of this size will be of special interest to comic fans.

GIFT COMICS #1 was published in 1942 and cost fifty cents. (For an issue this size, modern publishers would have to charge at least one dollar.) The edition reprinted, without covers, CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES #7, WOW COMICS #5, IBIS THE INVINCIBLE #1, BULLETMAN #4, and WHIZ COMICS #26, each originally published in 1942.

The book featured the type of cover which Fawcett was using quite often at the time. A large picture of Capt. Marvel appeared in the center with small figures of Bulletman, Golden Arrow, Mr. Scarlet, Ibis, and Spy Smasher scattered across the lower portion of the cover. This type of cover design was used not only on these special publications but also on various issues of AMERICA'S GREATEST COMICS. The idea behind the covers was, naturally, to let the big-seller of the Fawcett line, Capt. Marvel, attract the eye of the passing comic buyer. Of necessity, these covers, like so many of the period, were purely symbolic, attempting to attract readers by the mere presence of such legendary characters as Capt. Marvel rather than appealing to the reader because of some action-packed cover scene from a story within the issue. This speaks well, perhaps, of the popularity of the heroes of the forties in comparison to the drawing power of today's appently anemic bunch, none of whom are considered by their publishers worthy of a symbolic cover.

This question of symbolic covers leads to the fact that Fawcett was particularly willing to allow Captain Marvel to grace the cover of as many comics as was possible; whether he appeared in the book or not was not important. For instance, he appeared on the cover of ALL-HERO COMICS #1 but did not appear in the issue. He was the big-seller of Fawcett and as such served his purpose well in attracting the reader's eye. In this area, Marvel was also used to attract readers by association. In the ads for Spy Smasher's movie (see FANTASTIC MONSTERS #5, page 64 - ed.) and the Captain Midnight comic books, Captain Marvel stood alongside the hero so the reader could see that their favorite hero was behind the new character or gimmick; apparently, the feeling that Captain Marvel's success would rub off on the other hero was behind these moves.

The inside front cover of GIFT COMICS brings up the question of imitation in the early days. Not content with imitating super powers, the various publishers often borrowed comic book ideas from one and another In this case, Fawcett borrowed the concept of WORLD'S FINEST COMICS and put its biggest stars in AMERICA'S GREATEST COMICS. Captain Marvel, Bulletman, Spy Smasher, Minute Man, Mr. Scarlet and a few others appeared in these hundred-page, fifteen cent comics. Though it lasted only eight issues, the comic was nevertheless indicative of its era.

The first actual page of this issue brings up the question of the one-page table of contents-origin summation which appeared in most issues of CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES. Each issue reprinted the derivation of "Shazam" (which won't be repeated here lest the reader be TOO bored), some of the pertinent facts regarding the career of Billy Batson and a list of the stories to be included in the issue. The wisdom of this page may be questioned, even though it served a purpose.

First, the page was cut from the stories in an issue. This, however, didn't have great impact in the days of sixty-eight page comics; one page one way or the other didn't affect the stories greatly. Second, and most important in the negative argument, the page must have become tiresome for the regular Captain Marvel readers, who, having read the origin once, didn't need continuous repetition of the facts (remember that the frequency of publication in these days was monthly, tri-weekly, and even bi-weekly, depending upon the period, and this didn't allow a great deal of time for forgetfulness). On the positive side, this page catered to the new reader; all that a new fan would have to know about the origin and powers of Capt Marvel

reprinted from SLAM-BANG #2

was revealed on this page. Unfamiliar with the Shazam-lore of the Captain, a reader might be confused by some of the details of the story. As a result, a reader might be disatisfied; though sales of other comics indicate that this didn't affect many kids in any great way.

Of course, in this period, heroes were remarkably basic - no great knowledge of past incidents was needed to understand the adventures of these four-color swashbucklers. Unlike many modern adventures, the sundry details of the life and times of each hero were not brought into the stories every issue and only on occasion did an issue even refer to a previous issue (as in an editor's note). This spared the reader the complicated relationships which often hinder modern heroes (the Wonder Family, for instance) and allowed for a continuous level of action which cannot be equaled by modern comics.

The artwork in the Capt. Marvel stories was not quite as good as the artwork was at various times in the career of the Captain. The art, which was done partially by George Tuska, is inferior to the CC Beck artwork which is so often associated with Captain Marvel. The bodies lack the detail and facial conformality which has since become standards of the Marvel figure. In fact, later artwork by Kurt Schaffenberger far excelled this comparatively poor work but the stories which appeared in Schaffenberger's time were far inferior to those in GIFT COMICS.

The lead story brings to mind two points which are fairly characteristic of Capt. Marvel. First, Capt. Marvel's opinion of girls and women in general was appently that of a twelve year old. This naivety, probably included as a way to humanize the all-powerful hero in order to make reader identification easier, was more common in Marvel than in most of the prominent heroes of his time (although a likeness may be drawn to the serial western hero who takes his horse down the bridle path instead of a woman). In this story, for instance, Capt. Marvel is "played up to" by a dowager; when she is rescued from "The Ghost of The White Room," she explains that she doesn't "know HOW to thank" Marvel, who replies rather sheepishly, "GULP! Er - it's quite all right Madame - I - er - I -." Capt. Marvel's attitude of nervousness clearly paralleled the attitudes of most comic readers toward the opposite sex; namely, at the age of most comic readers (ten to twelve years), boys have just discovered the distaff side of the world but haven't quite adjusted to their findings.

Second, the weakness of Capt. Marvel as Billy Batson is clearly shown in this story. In one episode, Billy falls down a laundry chute, lands on his head and develops an extremely large bump on his cranium. Later, Billy is almost hypnotized into believing himself mad by a "ghost." These two incidents point out the weakness of Billy which aided the reader identification which was so important to these early comic books. Readers could identify with the less powerful Billy and the mighty Captain who has his human faults; but in an all-powerful character who performs no purely human feats, the reader sees only an inhuman machine-type of hero with no relation to reality.

This lead story and most other stories with Capt. Marvel point out what may have been a basic fault in Billy Batson's occupation. In the beginning of many stories, Billy tells his radio audience that he is going to relate the adventures of Captain Marvel. He naturally must refer to himself in all of these adventures; and naturally the time comes when he must Shazam for Capt. Marvel. Obviously, including the mention of the fact that Billy yells "Shazam" and is immediately replaced by the World's Mightiest Mortal could not be included in the broadcast - or the world would know the secret identity of the hero. One may understandably wonder how Billy was able to get around these points in the story.

He could always explain the appearence of Capt. Marvel as a coincidence; but a man whose wisdom was that of Solomon, as Capt. Marvel's supposedly was, would realize that the public would soon tire of so many coincidences. On the other hand, Billy might have explained that his yelling "Shazam" had about the same effect upon Capt. Marvel as Jimmy Olsen's signal watch has on Superman.

This latter possibility seems to be most likely in view of later developments in the strip. When Uncle Dudley was added to The Marvel Family, he was the owner/operator of Shazam, Incorporated, an organization which sold super-feats to those interested in purchasing them. Attempting to explain the derivation of Shazam might be difficult for the Marvels, unless Billy had previously explained that "Shazam" was the signal that danger threatened and that Marvel was needed (which, after all, it certainly was)?

Following the lead story came an ad for the Captain Marvel Club, an ad which appeded several times in the book. This type of club, similar to the Supermen of America, was another way in which the various publishers imitated each other. Most of the more successful characters had their own club at one time or another; and most had basicly the same type of "come-on." The Captain Marvel Club offered only a club card a Captain Marvel Badge, and a device for translating the secret code, all this for only five cents. The club seemed particularly deficient of suitable enticement to the young reader. This is particularly obvious when compared to the objects which could be had for a dime if one joined the Junior Justice Society of America (see the ALL-STAR index for details - ed.).

At a later time in the club's history, Fawcett made up, in part, for this early deficiency. The company later mailed a monthly letter from Captain Marvel to all members of the fan club and, perhaps, this was worth the price.

The second story, "Captain Marvel and the Science of Doctor Sarr," distinquishes itself only as typical of its age. The story involves an aging scientist who, probably having once read THE MASTERMIND OF MARS, transferred his brain into the body of a young, well-muscled thug. The story ultimately evolves into the type of mad scientist story which was so ubiquitous in these early Captain Marvel comics (although this story features a bit of a twist in that the scientist wants to switch bodies with Capt. Marvel). The mad scientist was fairly standard for the period - there were probably more mad scientists in the comics and in movie serials than will even exist in reality.

It seems odd that the use of the mad scientist has recently run a full cycle. Whereas the majority of scientists in the old comics were inevitably villains (while heroes were usually patriotic sorts - attorneys, radio announcers, reporters, or playboys), the scientist in modern comics usually plays the part of the super hero. With so many heroes playing the role of scientist, there is a relatively small number of scientists left to act as criminals.

The story also points out some of the credulity-stretching of these early comics. In one scene, for instance, Capt. Marvel clips Dr. Sarr on the chin; unlike Superman, Capt. Marvel pulls no punches. The insidious but misguided doctor is not only knocked unconscious by this mighty blow, but is sent through the roof of the building to land on nearby telephone wires. That such a mighty blow could be landed must be accepted if one is to enjoy the idea of the strip; but if such a blow were thrown, the unfortunate soul who was the recipent of the punch would undoubtedly lose all of his teeth and most of his skull (ceilings are generally hard on the head). In yet another instance, Dr. Sarr attempts to hypnotize Capt. Marvel; but by merely flashing a mirror in front of the doctor, Marvel causes the scientist to hypnotize himself. The impracticality of being hypnotized by yourself after saying only one sentence seems obvious - but Captain Marvel nevertheless performed the feat. This type of plot deficiency is common not only in Capt. Marvel stories but in many stories of the period. In general, the writers of the period weren't attempting to effect realism.

This failure to stay within the bounds of reality was evident in many comics in another way. In one issue of GREEN LANTERN, for instance, GL and Doiby were standing near the side of a building when they saw a woman about to be crushed by falling bricks from another side of the building. Green Lantern does not move as Doiby dashed forward to knock the girl from the path of the falling bricks. However, the bricks took a sudden detour, hitting GL - though he was a good distance from the accident and should not have been hit. Perhaps the most common instance of this seeming failure to consider the bounds of plausibility is the many times when a hero is battling a villain and the latter picks up a chair or brick which wasn't in the previous panel and which seems to materialize at the writer's mere thought., which is used as a

weapon. The writer who conceived these apparent errors probably felt that the plot would be advanced by the maneuver and, since readers of the period didn't particularly worry about the practicability of comic stunts, he was assured that no one would notice his faux pas. This type of thinking is evident in almost every title to come out of the period.

The attempted at emotion displayed in this story is also fairly typical of the failure of writers of the time to do no more than approximate reality. In the story, an assistant of Dr. Sarr attempted to help the doctor disect Capt. Marvel's body (for scientific purposes). In one scene, the assistant attempted to remove a leg with a saw; but when the doctor later asked him to use a blow torch, the man showed evident qualms. Though he doesn't mind amputating one of Marvel's legs, he objects to burning a hole through the hero; somehow, the emotionalism of the scene seems to be poorly handled.

The story, on a whole, serves mainly to show Captain Marvel's great powers. Perhaps as a counter-balance to the somewhat bumbling antics of Billy in the previous story, Capt. Marvel is depicted in this story as the all-powerful, though human, hero which he was in fact. Rope, coiled about his body from head to toe, is snapped by a mere flex of the muscle; a knife shatters on the impenetrable body; a saw looses its teeth; a blow torch fails to eradicate the hero; the attempts by the doctor to hypnotize Capt. Marvel meet with complete failure; and Marvel lives through a dose of gas which would "put an elephant to sleep!" If any readers had wondered about the Captain's claim to super heroism, after reading the first story in the issue, all doubts were cleared by this story.

Following this story comes one of the adventures of Captain Kid. This series, which is probably used for the same reason that Gold Key uses five page extra features (Bill Harris explained in D:C that these filler stories help to "alter the pace of the book" and "four pages of unrelated material is required by the Post Office for second class mailing), appeared in every issue of CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES; and, like the characters residing in Gasoline Alley, Captain Kid aged gradually in the strip so that while he started out as a child, he ended his existance in comicdom as a teenager. Artwise, the character bore a striking resemblance to Popeye; the arms and legs have the bulging forearms and calves which are typical of the Spinach Eater. A second similarity between the two cartoon features is that though the stories were to be taken in a light-hearted vein, the hero of each was performing a great service for mankind. Captain Kid was the great hero of Swatsville; he was, throughout his career, to save his girl, Bette Mae, from doom after doom.

The next story, "Captain Marvel and the Pirates of Port Peril," points out a basic failure in the concept of Shazam and the secret identity. According to page one of the issue, the change from Billy to Marvel is "so amazing. . .that most people never even realize what has happened." This premise can be accepted in many circumstances; however, in this story, Billy is tied up and, as he talks to the pirate captain, shouts Shazam and is, naturally, changed to Capt. Marvel. Even a pirate must be smart enough to realize that Billy had been replaced by Capt. Marvel, for the latter is bound in the ropes just like Billy. The Captain Villainy not only failed to express surprise at the exchange of Marvel for Billy, but revealed that he apparently expected the switch. He had previously tied the ropes to an explosive and, at the slightest jar to the rope, the explosives would go off, destroying a slave barrack (all this to explain why Marvel could bulge his biceps and break the ropes). If he knew that Captain Marvel would replace Billy, as he seems to, then one may ponder upon just how secret Capt. Marvel's alter ego was!

Following an ad for WOW COMICS and Mr. Scarlet, Captain Marvel returns for his final adventure in the first part of the comic "Capt. Marvel and the Slayer on Skis." The only point worth mentioning in connection with this story is Captain Marvel's reaction when a movie starlet whose life he had saved attempted to reward him. As soon as he saw the actress looking for him, he exclaimed, "I'm getting out of here," which he promptly did with a Shazam, to be replaced by poor Billy who must absorb the reward (a kiss on the cheek) for his lummox friend. Once again, Capt. Marvel's shyness among women has been pointed out.

This naivety of Marvel's with the opposite sex is rather difficult to reconcile in view of the standard hero of the forties (and sixties). A list of heroes' girl friends would undoubtedly far exceed the number of heroes that have been created (remember that some heroes, like Superman and Batman, have had several girl friends). In the forties, the relations between hero and damsel-in-distress almost necessitated a female companion for the heroes. Should all else fail, the hero could always save reader-prestige by rescuing his fair maiden. Capt. Marvel, by virtue of his failure to reach puberty in the fourteen years of his existence, was denied this basic story idea of female companionship.

In all probability, a portion of Marvel's uniqueness stems from his of understanding of the opposite sex. His very uniqueness in being the only hero who failed to comprehend the feminine mystique helped to seperate him from the crowd of heroes which existed in the period.

In the forties, the mainstay of most comic houses was not so much the big name character as the number and quality of variety of comics. In the dozens of variety comics which existed in the period were born a limitless number of all-time greats. Superman (ACTION COMICS), Batman (DETECTIVE COMICS), Captain Marvel (WHIZ COMICS), The Shield (PEP), Daredevil (SILVER STREAK COMICS), The Flash (FLASH COMICS), Green Lantern (ALL-AMERICAN COMICS), The Human Torch and Sub-Mariner (MARVEL MYSTERY COMICS), and virtually every star of major proportions which can be named (with Captain America being the only notable exception which comes to mind) received their start in these variety magazines. In comparison to the number of heroes created to appear in these magazines, a very small percentage actually received their own magazines (even Daredevil, considered by Jerry Bails to be one of the top ten heroes of the period, failed to receive his own book other than in name - for he appeared in only a few stories each issue, with the rest of the book devoted to other Lev Gleason characters). However, the fact remains that these variety comics were the spawning grounds of greatness; and they were also the "meat" of most lines in the forties.

Of all the companies in the forties, DC seems to have had the greatest success with variety comics. Of the magazines referred to in their ads as "The Big Eight" (all were monthlies, as were most of the major variety comics), almost all had at least one character of major stature and several strong supporting characters. Though Superman was the big name in ACTION COMICS, he was backed up by one of the most successful magician heroes of the period, Zatara. ADVENTURE COMICS was able to alternate such moderately successful heroes as Starman, Hourman, Sandman, and a short-lived Manhunter, none of whom ever received great stardom, but all of whom were nevertheless strong (all, with the exception of Manhunter, were in the JSA for a few issues). MORE FUN COMICS had to choose between the third most popular JSAer in the forties; the Spectre, and Dr. Fate, Green Arrow and Aquaman for the cover spot; SENSATION featured an exceptional cover star, Wonder Woman, but contained the weakest supporting characters of the eight magzibes; DETECTIVE COMICS always had Batman, but he was backed up by the popular Boy Commandoes and, if the desperation point were reached, the Crimson Avenger. FLASH COMICS could choose between the FLASH and Hawkman while ALL AMERICAN COMICS featured Green Lantern backed up by two of the longest lived JSA members, Dr. Midnite and The Atom; and even STAR SPANGLED COMICS managed to boast of the Guardian and the Newsboy Legion, Robot Man, and the Star Spangled Kid.

Herein lies one of the major differences between Fawcett and DC; the former never was able to match DC's depth in the variety comic field. Fawcett, at one time or another, had only four variety comics in its line; WHIZ COMICS, MASTER COMICS, WOW COMICS, and SLAM-BANG COMICS. The first title was easily the one with the most potential; Captain Marvel backed by Spy Smasher and Ibis, was a

combination equal to most at DC. The first few issues of MASTER COMICS had little depth; and the main hero, Master Man, was not an overwhelming success (DC apparently didn't think so for they sued the character out of existence, as Roy Thomas has explained in XERO). SLAM BANG COMICS was the weakest of the group; so weak, in fact, that it lasted only a few issues. WOW COMICS, like MASTER COMICS, had little great material in the earlier issues, with only Mr. Scarlet to hold up the sales.

MASTER and WOW COMICS werew able to boost sales by the simple expedient of adding Capt. Marvel Jr. and Bulletman to the former and Mary Marvel to the latter. This added depth, of sorts, to the mags and made them comparable to any three DC variety comics.

However, in the first few issues of WOW COMICS the merits of the book were based solel on merits of Mr. Scarlet, a rather dubious hero of crimson dress. WOW COMICS had only this one major feature, while MASTER COMICS had Bulletman and a fairly popular Minute Man, neither hero overly great but both possessing their own comics. The mere fact that neither comic was particularly "setting the world on fire" until the Marvel Family members were added doesn't speak too highly of the characters.

Mr. Scarlet was a Batman imitator; albeit not a very good one. He failed to capture the audience to which Batman appealed and, as a result, is remembered by comic fans only as a secondary feature. In his time, Mr. Scarlet was all that WOW COMICS had and, as a result, he appeared bfften in two and three stories each issue - at least until Mary Marvel began to appear.

Although there were many imitations in these earlier comics - imitations which were often more outright than those of those today - these duplicate heroes did not necessarily face doom because of the similarity. The important point was that the setting of the strips was different; and if this and the tone of the adventures could be different, the hero would have a good chance for success. Captain Marvel was a success because he was a complete modification of the Superman-type; Capt. America, despite his imitation of Batman, succeeded because he took the basic premise and changed the theme and setting of the stories. But Master Man and Wonder Man, two of the earliest Superman imitators, failed because bhey did not vary the basic theme enough; neither had the potential of Captain Marvel although all three possessed basically the same powers.

Herein lies the basic problem of Mr. Scarlet. Although there are some minor differences, the basic concept of Mr. Scarlet is no different than that of Batman. Both fight criminals; and the criminals are of the same general type. Whis, again, would not be be so bad, but the Batman simply out-classed Mr. Scarlet in the fighting of criminals.

A typical Batman story of the period was written almost like a pulp novel. The legends on each story were always wordy and filled with metaphorical melodrama. Further Batman didn't just race across the rooftops,

MR. SCARLET AND PINKY
The Crimson Crusaders of Justice!
THE LOOT OF CHRISTOPHER MURDEN
CONTRA
THE FEUD BETWEEN THE MURDENS AND THE GINTYS HAS LASTED THREE GENERATIONS WHEN BRIAN BUTLER, POLICE STATES PROSECUTOR, AND HIS YOUNG WARD PINKY, ALIAS MR. SCARLET AND PINKY, APPEAR ON THE SCENE. THEN SCARLET UNCOVERS A LEGACY OF HATE, AND THE FEUD ENDS WITH A STRANGE PACTRULE

he, "like the winged creature of the night that gives him his name. . . streaks over the silent rooftops," And Batman didn't merely swing on a Bat-rope, but, "like a plunging meteor, the Black Clad Warrior attacks while bullets still plop into the crumpled form..." of a dead body. And, when Robin believes Batman to have been killed, the former is not merely grief stricken, but, "grief and searing anger boil within Dick's breast as he trails the thugs, a small but dauntless avenger." Not only was the dialogue like a pulp, but the stories often had a similarity to the novels of the times. The villains were often able to build sympathy within the reader (Crime-Doctor and Two-Face, for instance); the many human interest stories off-set stories in which purely hateful characters like the Joker and Penguin ran rampant.

Mr. Scarlet simply had nothing to compare with this type of writing. His villains were, in part, weak; in WOW COMICS #5, for instance, he battles a ten-foot gang boss, a fire bug out to destroy his own property for the insurance money, and a mad scientist who has invented a mind-control ray. Perhaps the villains could have been developed into criminals worthy of Batman's mettle; but they weren't.

Another important factor in this failure of Mr. Scarlet to successfully imitate Batman was the artwork. Though Simon & Kirby supposedly handled earlier issues of WOW COMICS, the artwork was eventually taken over by the many Fawcett hacks of the period. None of these artists were really bad but nor were any especially good.

This brings up the simple fact that only a very rare character has become a phenomenal ww success without a distinctive, good art style. Joe Shuster's Superman was distinct; CC Beck's Captain Marvel was unique; Captain Marvel Jr. as interperted by Mac Raboy was superb - and highly successful; Plastic Man had Jack Cole; Batman had the distinct Bob Kane style which was captured in stories by other artists; Daredevil had Charles Biro's artwork; The Human Torch had Carl Burgos; Captain America had Simon & Kirby; and the list goes on. Therefore, it does not seem unusual that a hero with only mediocre artwork should be only mediocre in everything else (perhaps the only exception is the Blue Beetle, who despite poor artwork and poor stories managed to be one of the more successful characters of the forties).

In discussing art, two things must be taken into consideration. First, there is appearence; simply the

ability to draw handsome faces and bodies is all that is required here. But the second and most important part of art is adaptation; an artist is required to adapt the written page into panel format. For this reason, though Leonardo Da Vinci might have been able to draw beautiful bodies, he would probably have been unable to adapt a comic page as well as Simon and Kirby or Carmine Infantino.

Upon this basis, the Mr. Scarlet artist succeeded only in part. The bodies and faces were not entirely bad. His adaptaion of comic scripts left much to be desired, however. In one story, for instance, Mr. Scarlet and his companion, Pinky, leap out a window when they are called to duty. In the next panel, the two are apparently running over rooftops, despite the fact that they are bound to the ground because of their inability to fly. This type of mistake seems to typify "hack art." Whether due to unfamiliarity with the character, or simple inability, this type of error crept into many characters handled by lesser artists - and helped to spell the doom of the heroes.

Mr. Scarlet's plots were often so basic that the main component was action. This, in direct contrast to the mystery and drama of any Batman story of the period, failed to help the character because all in all, the plot boiled down to simply the hero and villain slugging it out until the former was victorious. Although this may not be entirely bad, in comparison to the stories of the very similar Batman, Mr. Scarlet's plots left much to be desired.

An interesting footnote to Mr. Scarlet is that he was the only hero being published by Fawcett in 1942 who wore an actual mask. The Marvel Family didn't wear a mask; Spy Smasher and the later Captain Midnight and the Phantom Eagle wore goggles but not masks; Bulletman wore a helmet, but not a face covering of any sort; and all of the other fawcett heroes wore nothing to protect their secret identities. This probably relates back to the simple naivety which the publishers used in connection with Capt. Marvel. In Marvel, the writers and editors never had great concern for the discovery of the secret identity - Billy would simply Shazam without ducking into a phone booth or a dark alley. This attitude carried over into later heroes and was also prevalent in the heroes created before Captain Marvel.

There were, in the forties, several heroes of high potential who failed to become big-sellers because of poor handling. The Manhunter, who appeared in ADVENTURE COMICS #73-92, had a great deal of potential, even though he was a Batman imitator. Having decided that was the "most dangerous game," the Manhunter tracked criminals in stories with titles like "Cobra of the Deep;" but despite a big build up (he displaced Sandman on the cover for two issues) the character failed to become a great success. Captain Flag, who appeared in BLUE RIBBON COMICS #16-22, is another hero who had great possibilities - but was unable to become a big success. (Of course the entire MLJ line was faultering, possibly because of the departure of editor Abner Sundell.)

For the most part, this type of potential was stifled by bad handling; but there is one character, The Hunchback, who had not only potential but fairly good handling - and failed to become even a moderately good seller in his very brief stay in WOW COMICS.

The Hunchback was one of the few heroes to make good use of the idea of superstitious criminals; though Batman, Bulletman, and many other heroes donned long-underwear which would supposedly strike fear into the hearts of criminals, only a few, like the Hunchback, really stood the chance of succeeding in affecting superstitious criminals by appearence alone (though presumably many criminals were afraid of the avenging fist of Batman). His hideous visage topped a pudgy, hunchedback body; all this belying great strength and agility.

In reality, the Hunchback, like so many super heroes of the time, was a handsome playboy, Alan Lanier. Donning his green costume, hunched back and face mask, he emerged as The Hunchback, righting wrongs somewhat injudiciously.

The Hunchback was one of the many brutal heroes of the forties. In the GIFT COMICS episode of the character, he deflects a knife with his cane in such a way that it lands in a criminal's throat; he throws an entire pack of criminals into a harbor; clobbers several criminals with his cane; causes one gang-boss to leap from a twentieth story window and throttles the life from a district attorney who had been taking a cut of the gang-boss's protection racket. This brutality of the Hunchback was, perhaps, in keeping with the character; for a deformed super hero can hardly be expected to be gentle with his foes.

However, the Hunchback's crime fighting took the form of taking the law into one's own hands and setting oneself up as the judge, jury, and executioner. This was purely against comic book ethics of the period; while heroes had no compunction about accidently causing the death of a vilain, few actually caused the death intentional - murder is murder no matter what the reason. Although a few heroes took the law into their own hands on an occasion or two (Batman is known to have taken the life of a criminal who deserved death), few went to the extent of Brutality to which the Hunchback rose in just one story.

The artwork on the character was excellent, and rather typical of many artstyles. The face of Lanier was almost like Al Williamson's later efforts; and the art featured a thin ink line which set it off from heroes of the time. This style of thin ink lines which is so distinctive in the period is evidenced in many strips, including Rusty Ryan and the Boyville Brigadiers, Dollman, Ghost of Flanders and many other minor characters of the period. Apparently this art style which when handled by the more adept artists was rather adult in concept, failed to have the appeal of simpler styles, such as those possessed by Beck and Fellow Fawcett artists.

Although the Hunchback was a short-lived character, he was an early indication of the trends in comic publishing. Violence in comics was beginning to get out of hand - at least this was so when weak heroes were featured by some of the lesser companies. The trend erupted five years later into the crime and horror comics of the early fifties and who is to say that Alan Lanier, alias The Hunchback, did not have something to do with the start of the trend?

WOW COMICS was one of the weaker variety of comics for Fawcett. Whenever a company had a weak link, such as this publication, it generally filled the book with non-entities which could never have been seriously considered possible of great success. In the case of many titles, such as HIT COMICS, BIG SHOT COMICS (though this one was not intended for the same purpose) and FEATURE COMICS, after the main stars (Kid Eternity, Skyman and Sparky Watts, and Dollman, respectively) there was little worth discussing.

The two weakest features in WOW were Rick O'Shay and Jim Dolan. The former was an American G.I. who, in all probability, single-handedly won the war in each issue. In this one issue, for instance, he is the only soldier who fails to waver under enemy fire, and eventually stems the tide of battle in favor of the American-British-Russian side. Later, he goes on to destroy a Nazi-held dam which, according to the British commander, is so important that destroying it is the "one way to halt the Nazis." Naturally, the man assigned to the job had only one chance in ten thousand of surviving and, just as in the war melodramas of the movies of the period, Rick O'Shay managed to survive. He was the forerunner of the modern comic book war hero, winning his way despite thousand-to-one odds. As POV brought out in the last issue, these stories might not be so bad were it not for the broad stereotype into which all comic war heroes fall.

Jim Dolan was the editor of Detective Magazine who, in his spare time, managed to chase Zara, the master spy of World War II. He was neither better nor worse than a dozen or so other heroes of similar proportions; and in plot and artwork, he exceeded none. His failure was inevitable; few heroes of the detective-type have succeeded in capturing a large comic audience and only Slam Bradley of DETECTIVE COMICS comes to mind as having had any real measure of success with the basic idea.

Completeing the weak WOW line-up was Atom Blake, Boy Wizard, a character who combines Kid Eternity, Captain Marvel and Ibis the Invincible into one somewhat inane hero. The Great Atom, as he was called, was a youngster who had mastered science to such a degree that he could create scientific formulae which, by merely being spoken (as in Ibis), could perform such such wondrous feats as the transportation of Blake and his friends from one planet to the next. Adding a touch of Green Lantern, the character had a power ring of sorts which had a repellent effect upon objects. From Captain Marvel, Atom Blake borrowed eight strength and from Kid Eternity, he borrowed a "magic word" (actually the formulae) and the concept of teenage super hero.

In the forties, there was a breed of super-men which is rare in modern comics. These heroes, most of whom donned only tuxedo or business suit when going into action, were magicians of the period. These characters fell into two basic categories, First, there was the type of magician represented by Mandrake; he had no real power and was using mainly hypnosis to perform his miracles. Zatara represents a second breed of magician, a type which was more common in the comics; he perhaps would have been too gosh-wow for sophisticated comic strip readers. Zatara actually possessed a power - by pronouncing commands backwards, he could perform virtually any feat.

Into this last category must fall Ibis the Invincible. Possessed of the Ibistick, Ibis could perform any feat which he cared to - by merely speeking the deed. Of all the magicians created in the forties (and there were many) only a few really had any measure of success (with the exception of Mandrake, none ever really became top-notch stars). Only Zatara had as much possible appeal as Ibis in the magician ranks; and Ibis, who lasted as long as Captain Marvel, is perhaps the unchallenged leader of comic book magicians.

However, the character was rather typical of the Fawcett mediocrity of the period. Despite the fact that he possessed his own comic book, he failed to have any particular consistency in the plots in which he appeared. For instance, in one story Ibis leaves his Ibistick, the source of power for any who come in contact with it, in his hotel room where it is likely to be lost, stolen or broken. This type of clumsy plotting is evident throughout the reprinted first issue of IBIS THE INVINCIBLE.

Artwise, the character seemed to have been handed a rather rough deal. The artist was not bad in comparison with many of the artists who worked in the forties, but he was hardly even as good as the Mr. Scarlet artist.

Ibis bore a strong resemblance in powers to the Spectre and, in some ways, Doctor Fate. Ibis and the Spectre were certainly more powerful than Superman. By a mere incantation, either could perform super feats which would require effort of a physical sort from Superman. However, characters with such great powers inevitably have a problem. This can easily be pointed out by discussing one of the Ibis stories in number one. An Oriental dictator had united in slavery all Orientals and was waging war on all lands of the west. After various twists and turns in the plot of no particular interest, Prince Ibis managed to capture the evil dictator. Meanwhile, however, all of the Yellow Leader's forces had launched an all-out attack against nearby allied forces. Ibis and the would be conqueror went to the scene of battle where Ibis dissolved the tanks of the yellow invaders; and then destroyed their guns. Naturally, this ended the battle rather effectively.

However, had Ibis used a bit more intelligence, he could have ended the battle by simply wishing it ended - rather than having to worry about dissolving tanks and guns. By the same token, he could have ended the entire threat merely by wishing it to be ended.

In characters of the Ibis sort, magical powers become so great that action can only be achieved by ignoring the obvious solution and adopting

a round-about, though action packed, plan of action. Ibis, whose reason for heroism was to rid the world of hate, greed, and injustice, seems to have conveniently forgotten that by merely wishing mankind to forget these evils he could achieve his goal - and have time to wed his faithful girl friend, Tala.

This problem has plagued super heroes almost from their start. Though all-powerful, Superman was merely muscular - and could not perform magical stunts of such encompassing scope. Later Heroes like Green Lantern, Ibis, Spectre and some others had this basically tremendous power which they failed to use correctly. No doubt the demise of some of them has been at least in part caused by this overpowering strength.

In several respects, Ibis bore a close resemblance to Green Lantern. Each, by more or less wishing, could perform miraculous feats. Each had such tremendous power that either would be a suitable match for Superman. Both received their powers through magic; Green Lantern from a supernatural meteor and Ibis from the magical Ibistick. Each also had an object from which their power emanated - the power ring and the Ibistick.

Aside from the costume and setting differences (Ibis seemed to roam the world while GL stayed mainly in the United States), one of the major contrasts between GL and Ibis was in the type of stories used. As late as 1953, Ibis was appearing in serious stories with about the same plotting mediocrity as the stories of his earlier days. Green Lantern however, after appearing in many serious stories through the first 15 or so issues of his own comic began to be swept-up by the ridiculousness of the period. Streak the Wonder Dog and Doiby Dickles began to take the spotlight in a series of supposedly comic stories which even managed to take Green Lantern off the cover on the last few issues, to be replaced by Streak. One can't be too surprised that the inferior Ibis outlasted Green Lantern, in view of what happened to the latter in his later years!

Other than Capt. Marvel, Fawcett had no really big seller. Spy Smasher apparently had a large following; and many of the old heroes managed to receive their own comic books - but few stick out as being exceptional. Certainly one of the most popular heroes of the Fawcett group was Bulletman, a character who appeared in almost as many different comics as Capt. Marvel and his family.

BULLETMAN's main drawback was his close imitation of Hawkman. His only real power was that of flight; but he was, of course, possessed of an iron constitution - which stood him in good stead when he was the target of some nefarious scheme (his helmet, which attracted bullets, didn't hurt any.). He was accompanied by Bulletgirl throughout most of his career. Aiding the analogy was the fact that both Hawkman's and Bulletman's adventures generally involved criminals - rather than Nazis.

The main problem with this imitation was was the fact that Bulletman wasn't as good as Hawkman for the most part; Hawkman outclassed the Flying Detectives on almost every .level. Artwise, Bulletman maintained a generally low level; though his art was handled excellently for a period by Mac Raboy. Storywise, the plots were basic, like most of the Fawcett stories of the time. Hawkman, meanwhile, had good artwork by Sheldon Moldoff and fine stories by Gardner Fox.

Like many of the contemporary heroes at Fawcett, Bulletman spent some of his time battling weird menaces - a headless murderer, and the Gorgon (a revived Medusa). Though both of these villains were actually humans, the implication of the supernatural was present. Oddly enough, this trend really began to affect the Fawcett group six or seven years later. During the last years of the Fawcett comics group, the Marvel Family began to battle almost exclusively weird menaces of the ghostly type. Though many of these stories were fairly tame for the period, it is interesting to note that these menaces led the Marvel Family to a low rating when an anti-comic organization began to issue ratings of all comic magazines according to objectionability.

At any rate, though Bulletman and Mr. Scarlet generally fought the same type of criminal, the former always, apparently, had better handling. While Mr. Scarlet struggled to solve a crime by brute force and continuous fighting, Bulletman attempted to "crack the case" with deduction and other crime-fighting techiques. As a result, the plots were generally better constructed than those of Mr Scarlet.

The last title to appear in GIFT COMICS is WHIZ. The first feature is, of course, Capt. Marvel. The splash panel is devoted to the derivation of Shazam and a bit of detail on the Marvel legend which is similar to the first page of each CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES.

A glance at the list of Shazam heroes brings to mind the fact that had Capt. Marvel actually possessed only what each hero is reputed to have given him, he would not have been a complete Superman imitator. For instance, he is not actually given the power of flight by any of the heroes. Though Mercury and presumably Zeus possessed this power, they bequeathed only speed and power, respectively, to the Big Red Cheese. The powers which are derived from the other heroes are fairly typical of all super heroes (with some exceptions). Wisdom, Courage, and Stamina are possessed by every super hero; and strength is optional depending upon the character.

For what he possessed, Capt. Marvel was more an imitation of Fawcett's old Master Man than Superman. Naturally, the two Fawcett heroes possessed the same strength, stamina and other basic powers. However, the big differences between these two heroes and Superman is that neither of the former actually possessed the power of flight. As Roy Thomas explained, Master Man "could run like the devil," but he could not fly. If the reader assumes that capt. Marvel possessed specifically the power of speed, but not that of flight, one could easily see how Captain Marvel should have been a reincarnation of Master Man.

SPY SMASHER

Another point of interest regarding Capt. Marvel is the fact that Billy Batson was not actually Capt. Marvel! The two were treated as separate characters. Billy generally referred to his alter ego as "Capt. Marvel" (even in thought balloons) rather than as "I;" and Marvel generally referred to Batson as "Billy." In case this is not proof enough of the fact that the two were not supposed to be one and the same, the WHIZ COMICS story features such lines as, "Captain Marvel....comes to Billy Batson's aid when he called." Further, when Billy discovers that he can't "change" to Marvel, he asks, "Why can't I call on Captain Marvel?" In each of these cases, had the two actually been the same, the sentence would have been different ("Billy Batson becomes Captain Marvel when needed," and, "Why can't I become Capt. Marvel?"). Though the legend of Captain Marvel always claimed that Billy "is changed into Capt Marvel," evidences are to the contrary.

In fact, all things considered, the analogy which is used in WHIZ COMICS, relating Marvel to Aladdin and his lamp, seems more the correct relation than that of an actual alter ego. In all probability, Capt. Marvel more or less went into a lamp when not called upon; he ceased to exist until Billy needed help. When called, his place in the "lamp" was taken by Billy.

In early 1942, Capt. Marvel was apparently having much the same trouble with Sivana as Green Lantern is cuurently having with Sinestro. In CAPTAIN MARVEL ADVENTURES #5, Marvel forced Sivana to drink a potion which changed the latter into a kindly scietist, called Dr. C. Vanna. In WHIZ COMICS #26, Dr. Vanna is accidentally thrown back into time - to a period prior to the time when Marvel gave Sivana the potion; as a result, Dr. C. Vanna becomes Sivana. At the end of the story, however, Marvel shoots Sivana into the distant future - 5,000 years into the future, to be exact. Naturally, Sivana later returned to resume his attempts to become Emperor of the World. Apparently, Captain Marvel had about as much luck ridding the world of Sivana's menaces as Green Lantern has had ending Sinestro's machinations.

Following Captain Marvel's adventure, Golden Arrow, archer of the old west, appears. The character is fairly stereotyped. He has the fastest horse in the west (ED: as do all western heroes), and White Wind, as it is called, can be ridden only by its master. He is the scourge of all bad men, and in the true hero fashion, Golden Arrow donates the reward which he received for capturing Billy the Cad, to the orphan's home.

However, the story manages to be half-way decent. For a western, the story was fairly good, as a matter of fact. However, it is interesting to note that Golden Arrow did not once fire an arrow in the entire story.

This was a fairly popular character in his time. He managed to appear in many WHIZ COMICS as well as in many of the various anthology comics which Fawcett published. Golden Arrow was a western hero at a time when the western comic was beginning to take hold of America's youth. Though there had been many western comics in the past, the attention had been centered upon super heroes. By 1942, the trend toward westerns which actually began to pick up steam several years later, was becoming evident.

However, Golden Arrow was not a particularly enlightened western star. Like most of the Fawcett heroes, he had rather poor artwork. His stories were bad, even by kiddie matinee standards. Western heroes of the early fifties and the present are vastly superior to this character in virtually every way; but Golden Arrow was one of the earliest attempts by a predominantly super hero publisher to break away from the old mold and create a western star. As such, Golden Arrow was at least a step in the right direction.

Next in WHIZ COMICS is a seafaring adventure story of fairly good quality, entitled Lance O'Casey. This strip, which lasted till the end of WHIZ, was an interesting change of pace in several ways. First the art was better than most of the art in the WHIZ section of GIFT COMICS. Second, the plot was good. The character combined the lure of pirates of the past with modern day sea-going menaces; and the result was fairly interesting.

Spy Smasher is the next feature of WHIZ. This was one of the most popular Fawcett characters; outside of Capt. Marvel, none of the old bunch really had quite as much appeal. At one time or another, Spy Smasher appeared in WHIZ COMICS (until issue 76), AMERICA'S GREATEST COMICS, the 3 big holiday editions of GIFT, XMAS, and HOLIDAY COMICS and also in his own comic which lasted 11 issues (as well as appearing in his own movie serial). With the exception of the Marvel Family, only Bulletman of the Old Fawcett line had so successful an existence.

Of the many extra heroes created by Fawcett, Spy Smasher was easily one of the best. First, he was a typical hero. He had a girl friend, Eve Corby, and a prying older friend, Eve's father. Like so many heroes of the period, he fought the nazis forces. However, he had several things which most heroes lacked. He had fairly decent artwork after his initial efforts. The plots generally were fairly good; and while the plot in WHIZ #26 is rather average for the time, some of his stories managed to be fairly interesting.

Like so many heroes, Playboy Alan Armstrong fought the Axis without any special powers. Like Skyman, Spy Smasher had a special airplane type of device, this one called a Gyrosub. The character was obviously not too original. However, he, like so many other imitators of the period, had quite a bit of success. Further, Spy Smasher was not particularly better than many other comic characters. This brings up the question (which this writer can't answer) of why he was popular - there were many characters with better stories who had the same set-up; the artwork for the most part was only average; ans the stories were certainly not superior to some of the stories which were available at the time. The only thing in Spy Smasher's favor (aside from appearing in such an overwhelmingly popular magazine as WHIZ COMICS) was the fact that he better than many of the five or six hundred super heroes which existed in his time.

Further perplexing is the fact that today's comics are vastly superior to these forties efforts - and yet modern comics can't seem to get off the ground. Today's super heroes sell pretty much on the same level, with none able to clearly step up to take the lead, other than Superman of course. With superior quality, it would seem that today's comics should sell better than the imitative products of the past.

However, the situation is not the same today as it was in the forties. First, in the forties, comic books were new. Though comics had been in existence since 1911, the real comics boom did not occur until late 1939, and early 1940. As a result, kids were just getting started reading these things and, in all probability, were able to enjoy them simple because these were comic books. Second, comics of the forties made only a half-hearted attempt to approximate reality. Whereas modern comics are bound by limitations of science, the early characters felt only such bonds as the editors cared to impose. This, naturally, aided the escapism of the medium. Third, the comics of the period were able to play on the patriotism of juveniles. Though modern comics are more or less forced to combat the mere evils of crime, comics of the forties could delve into not only crime but also into the world of spies and dictators. As a result of frequent handling in various media, communist fighting simply doesn't have the appeal, right now, that Nazi-smashing once had. Thousands of copies of each publication were shipped to the men in the Army,Navy and Air Force. During the war, apparently, comics of the patriotic sort were not only good escape literature (a pulp might have suffered as escape literature but they took longer to read) but also were good for morale. The comic business boomed, partially because the men overseas were willing to purchase the books--this constitutes the fourth reason; modern comics don't have the vast overseas market they once had. Fifth, the value of comics has gone down. Many adults who read comics as children will probably express surprise when told of the two cent price increase - and the thirty-two decrease - in comics since their days. Children can now buy less comics than they could many years ago. Sixth, television has affected the comic audience in several ways. Aside from cutting into time which was at one time spent reading comic books, television has exploited the adventure themes which once were popularized in comic books and movie serials. As a result, comic publishers have had to move into different areas - and pure adventure comics have become a thing of the past. These are just some of the reasons - someone with more knowledge of the field could probably go into greater detail as to why modern comics haven't the appeal of forties' publications. But the fact remains: modern comics will probably never regain their stature of the past.

The Dr. Voodoo story in GIFT COMICS is not particularly great. First, it is part of an apparent serial; unless one was a regular reader of the strip, the story would have little or no meaning. Second, the entire six pages is devoted to Voodoo's attempts to reach a castle which is owned by a master of black magic. Before reaching the castle doors, Voodoo must defeat eagles, dwarfs, slaves, and giant hounds; and when he finally reaches the castle, he is captured by "the death guard." The plot is obviously not too massive.

THE strip had one unusual point. There is no dialogue, in the comic book sense; and the strip is drawn in a modified Prince Valiant style. Without word or thought balloons, the strip manages to advance rather nicely and, had the author something more vital to say, Dr. Voodoo might have done rather nicely with the style of presentation pioneered by Hal Foster and Alex Raymond.

It seems odd that this type of presentation has never been used to any great extent in comic books. Though the idea has been watered down and used on occasion, no comic book has actually attempted to use the Prince Valiant style alone - with no modifications.

In all probability, there are various reasons why comic publishers feel that this would not be successful in comic books. First, many of the younger readers don't read the captions which appear in comics. They follow the story through dialogue and thought balloons and are added by the

illustrations. Cutting out the thought and word balloons would cause many young people to "read" the story solely from the pictures - which would be difficult. Second, one of the reasons which has been Given for children's enjoyment of comics is that the script is easy to follow. At a glance, the reader can see exactly who is saying what. Using Prince Valiant captions for everything would make this difficult - at a glance, the reader could not tell who is speaking. Third, the flow of continuous movement is hindered in comic books by this style of presentation. After each sentence of speech, the author must include, "explains Val." This slows the pace of the strip and this is detrimental to comic books. Finally, this style of presentation requires an extremely fine artist. Though the story might be followed simply by the dialogue, each picture, which is simply a picture and not a panel, must have some artistic merit. Few of the current comic artists would handle this successfully. The few former comic artists, Al Williamson, Frenk Frezetta and perhaps Mac Raboy among others, who could do this type of art are working on more lucrative assignments in other fields.

It might be mentioned here that these 4 reasons are not valid in consideration of comic strips. First, comic strips are read mainly by adults who are conditioned to reading novels - which have no word or thought balloons. Action is rarely the keynote.in adult comic strips or novels and, as a result, thisw style of presentation is better suited to an older audience. Second, and most importantly, the comic strip field has attracted some of the best writers and artists available. A man of the calibre of Hal Foster, for instance, will be able to sell his services at a price which is beyond that of most comic book publishers. As a result, the artistic perfection of Prince Valiant (and Flash Gordon when it was handled this way) was unequaled. (Prince Valiant ism often used by art students as a base of studies.)

GIFT COMICS ends with an abbreviated Ibis adventure. It, like several other stories in the issue (Dr. Voodoo and Jim Dolan) ended before the solution to the problem was presented and was probably published this way because of space problems.

GIFT COMICS remains fairly representative of its era. In comparison to modern comics, GIFT seems rather inferior; the art and stories would, for the most part, never be accepted by any modern publisher, Charlton included. Though much criticism has been leveled against these strips in this article, the point should be made that this was the cream of the crop in the forties. Few companies really had any truly great material.

Other than DC, no company had an extensive, high-quality line. After Captain Marvel, Fawcett had nothing of importance; Timely had the Human Torch, Namor, and Captain America, but little with which to back them up. Fox had only the Blue Beetle: Quality had the Blackhawks, The Spirit and Plastic Man - but neither company had a great volume of material with which to back these successes.

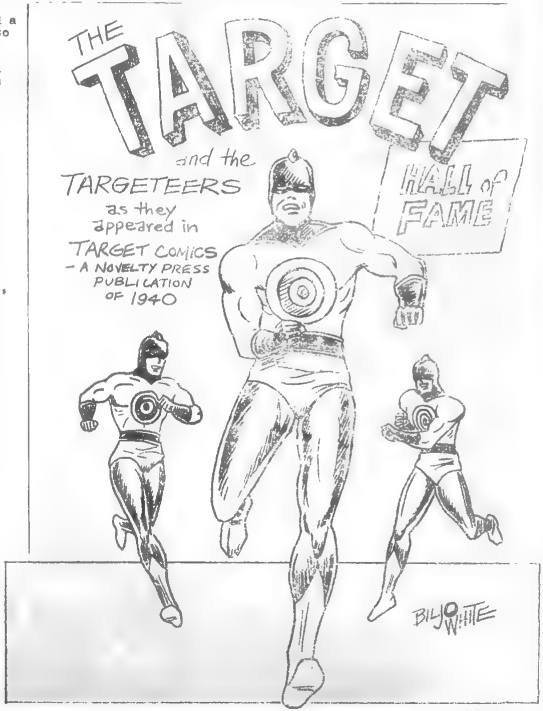
This is understandable. In the forties, virtually anything published apparently sold. If the strips had a little originality, fair artwork and adequate plots, it would understandably become a success. The majority of the writers were hacks; some had been unable to work successfully in pulps and other fields of writing. However, most were not particularly proficient in comic writing.

Over the years, these hack writers have been removed from the comic field. Their material would no longer sell so no publisher could use these writers. Only the "greats" of the forties were kept and, while many of them have departed for other fields, the comic industry is still kept alive by these men. Gardner Fox, Julius Schwartz, Mort Weisinger, Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and quite a few others are examples of men who turned out quality material in the forties and are still doing it.

It is not surprising, therefore, that modern comics are superior to those of the past. With only the best of the field to choose from, modern comics are naturally produced on a higher level than those of the past.

But still, it is odd that today's high-quality comics are not selling as well as the low quality material of the past. There is apparently no way to figure out the buying public!

THE END


THE TARGET
and the TARGETEERS
as they appeared in TARGET COMICS - A NOVELTY PRESS PUBLICATION OF 1940
HALL of FAME
BILL WHITE

HALL OF INFAMY

by L. L. SIMPSON

Welcome, fellow lovers of villainy, to the cob-webbed corridors of my memory, where lurk the greatest evil-doers ever to xxxx spice up the pages of a comic book. I speak not of today's weak-sister villains, but of the collosal super-criminals of yesteryear, who would steal pennies from a blindman or commit murder with equal ease. I have in mind such notorious fellows as the original Two-Face, the Toyman, the Hun, Sivana, Capt. Nazi, the Brain Wave, the Red Skull, Solomon Grundy, and two others I'd like to recall for you--The Claw and Ironjaw. These two master villains were both the special creations of Comic House, Inc., who published SILVER STREAK, DAREDEVIL, and BOY COMICS.

The Claw was one of the few villains to star in his own feature-strip. He was even cover-featured on the very first issue of SILVER STREAK COMICS (December, 1939). He was also featured in DAREDEVIL COMICS and a special one-shot, DAREDEVIL BATTLES HITLER (July, 1941. According to a later retelling of his origin, the Claw came to Earth from a distant planet and set up a base of operations in the mountains of Tibet. (Originally, it was the island of Ricca in the mid-Pacific.) In any case, he was one of thew first space creatures to descend upon comicdom with evil aims.

Huge in size--he made King Kong seem like a schoolboy--the Claw was oriental in appearence with slanted eyes, yelow skin, heavy bushy eyebrows, fanglike teeth, and long slender (claw-like) fingers. He usually wore a black skullcap and red robe. Soon after landing on Earth he learned that he could control his growth; he could become mountain-sized, man-sized, or mouse-sized, and all within seconds. But this was the least of his powers; his greatest powerxx lay in his cruel, brilliant mind. With sciences unknown to Earthmen, he could design awesome war machines and produce deadly gases. Naturally, with powers like these, he set his eyes on global conquest.

His first step was to enslave local natives with a mad-dream machine. By a process known as "acclimation," the natives became addicted to the ecstatic dreams induced by the machine. Only by loyally serving the Claw could the subjects be assured of blissful sleep. The disloyal suffered the torments of agonizing nightmares. With his slave army, the Claw built a large war base and set out to conquer America, a feat which he obviously never accomplished. One of the least prepared of all nations for war (at that time), the U.S.A. had mighty industries and huge natural resources that the Claw wanted to control. He attempted to hypnotize America's leaders, he immobilized great cities with sleep gas fogs, and he tunnelled into Alcatraz to recruit the convicts, all in an attempt to conquer America; but always he failed. Always, men ahd women of skill and courage appeared to smash his evil schemes.

One of these heroes was a young fellow in a colorfull black and scarlet costume named Daredevil! Daredevil fought the Claw many times, always winning each battle (naturally). Daredevil even won a feature-strip of his own and then turned his attention to other villains. From that point on, the Claw's own strip became a secondary feature, and in the mid-forties, the Claw was finally assassinated (DAREDEVIL #32). In the late forties, however, the Claw showed signs of new life. He attempted a comeback--this time in Rocky X (a secondary feature in BOY COMICS). He attacked Earth with a fleet of Rocketships, BUT again he failed, and once again he was dropped from the comics.

In the fantastic world of comics, the Earth can match Space Evil for evil, and even the evil Claw had his earthly counterpart. This was Ironjaw--arrogant, cruel, and completely evil. In appearence, hew was a hulking giant with a blond crewcut, hard pig-like eyes, coarse evil features, and an ugly metal jaw. The metal jaw replaced the real one he lost in a grenade blast in World War I. During that war, Ironjaw, then a sargeant in the German army, met and became friends with a young private, a former house-painter, named Hitler.

When Hitler formed a hardfisted, gangster-like political group, Ironjaw became his chief bully. With their cunning brutal tactics, the Nazi Party came into power in Germany. As Der Fuehrer of

Germany, Hitler turned greedy eyes upon neighboring countries, and Ironjaw became his top agent, super-spy, and saboteur.

Finally in 1941, Ironjaw came to America. His first task in America was to silence a man named Chandler who was speaking out against the atrocities of Nazi Germany. When Chandler shrugged off threats, Ironjaw shot him before a radio audience, then followed his victim to a hospital where, disguised as a doctor, he finished his grisly job on the operating table.

Chandler's teenaged son, Chuck, was playing hockey when he learned of his father's plight. Still wearing his bright red hockey suit and a blue cape, the youth hurriedly left the game to be with his father in the hospital. He arrived to late. Immediately the youth caught an plane bound for Lisbon. Ironjaw aware of the boy's movements, realized that Chuck was trying to reach his unsuspecting mother in Europe. The master villain sent orders to Nazi agents in Lisbon: "Get the boy!" But the agents were unprepared for the boy and his unusual athletic skill and determination, and he escaped. The youth found his mother and they booked passage on the first ship for America. Ironjaw feared that Chuck, with his mother's help, would continue in his father's footsteps. A wolfpack of subs was ordered out. The submarines soon sank the ship. Although Chuck was able to save his injured mother from drowning, a sub machine-gunned the helpless couple, leaving Chuck the sole survivor. Young Chandler swore revenge, and it was in this way that Ironjaw created his own nemesis. Retaining his red hockey suit and blue cape as a costume, the youth became Crimebuster, and relentlessly he tracked down the brutal master spy. (The origin of Crimebuster appeared in the April, 1941 issue of BOY COMICS and was reprinted in the October 1946 issue.)

For years, whether Ironjaw sought to Kidnap an American Scientist, sabotage an important factory, or murder a key military man, he saw his most vicious plans wrecked by the hero he created. Finally, in the middle forties, Ironjaw "died" after one last climactic battle.

In the late forties, like the Claw and many another comicdom villain, Ironjaw returned from the dead--this time as a communist. As before, he and Crimebuster--now a young man--met head-on. In the beginning, he did much better than the Claw; his comeback battles with CB lasted for almost two years, but in the end he suffered a far more bitter fate--he became the comic stooge for a half-witted gang of crooks in a non-amusing comic strip called "Sniffer & his Deadly Dozen." A more cruel fate a villain never suffered.

Well, there you have it--a portrait of two of my favorite evil-doers of yesteryear. Unfortunately, as long as the Comcs Code Authority rules the comic books, these great arch-villains will never be revived to their former glory. I guess they will just have to remain in my own private Hall of Infamy.

THE HISTORY OF FLASH COMICS

reprinted from COMICDOM #1

BY PAUL GAMBACCINI

Taking all factors of supply/demand/desirability into consideration, FLASH COMICS is probably the most sought-after title in comicdom, including ALL STAR since only 57 issues of the hero variety of this title were published. And why not? Giving the roll call of FLASH is like taking a tour through a museum where busts of comic history's greatest are lined up in splendor: Flash, Hawkman, Joe Kubert, Carmine Infantino, Gardner Fox, Lee Elias, Sheldon Moldoff, Ed Wheelan, Whip, E.E. Hubbard, Minute Movies, Robert Kanigher, Sheldon Mayer, John B. Wentworth, Elongated Man, John Broome, Homer Fleming, Kid Flash, Black Canary, Atom, Green Lantern, Paul Reinman, Ghost Patrol, Cliff Cornwall, Murphy Anderson, Johnny Thunder, Joe Giella, and Julius Schwartz are just some of the many features and personalities connected with this all-time great.

The history of FLASH COMICS started in November, 1939, in which FLASH #1 went on sale. Editor Sheldon Mayer apparently had big plans, for he started the magazine on a monthly schedule. The cover of this first story portrayed Flash catching bullets shot at his sweetheart, Joan Williams. Inset bubbles depicted Cliff Cornwall, Whip, Johnny Thunder, and the Hawkman. These bubbles, on the left side of the cover, continued for the first several issues, with the same scene. After the discontinuation of this policy, one bubble appeared on the cover, where the DC symbol now rests. The DC symbol then appeared either below the bubble or where the Comics Code seal now is. Flash and Hawkman eventually became the rotating cover features, with the other appearing in the bubble. To continue with #1, the origin of Flash was the headlining attraction. Flash, the lead-off feature in this and later ALL-FLASH, was one of six star characters; Superman headlined in ACTION, Sandman in ADVENTURE, Batman in DETECTIVE, Spectre took top billing in MORE FUN, and Ultra Man was the favorite in ALL AMERICAN (at that time).

Jay Garrick, student and Western State University, inhaled "hard water" fumes by accident and became endowed with the speed of light, the reflexes of a bolt of lightning,-- a living reincarnation of the ancient Greek God, Mercury!! The artist for the first Flash tale, Harry Lampert, only succeeded in making the hero look hideous! Unlike the modern version by Carmine Infantino, Lampert gave no illusion of movement. But the worst sin of all was the lettering. The only comparison today as far as harried, uneven lettering is concerned is the Sgt. Fury adv in SPIDERMAN #4. Early Flash plots included such tried-and-true ideas as the blackmailed relative and the protection of a valuable person. Flash got 13 pages in these early stories, for these were 69 pages (including covers), of which only 2 or 3 were devoted to ads.

The next feature, as far as importance to fandom is concerned, was Hawkman. Drawn by one Dennis Neville in FLASH #1-4, Hawkman was a reincarnated Egyptian. These early stories had poor art and only so-so plots. With #5, however, Sheldon Moldoff, one of comicdom's greats, took over the strip and it showed a marked improvement. His version of the Hawk in FLASH #5 is one of the high spots in my collection. Moldoff's art was especially notable for its fine balance of light and dark colors, totally unlike modern artists. Regrettably, the early plots were nothing great, and were downright boring in several cases. Students of the Comics Code may be interested to know that, in FLASH #3, Hawkman pinned his foe's hand to the wall, using a sharp knife, and blood spurts from the open wound. This is something Gardner Fox wouldn't dare try today!

Still another star of FLASH #1 was Cliff Cornwall. Cornwall, another Fox creation, was blessed with the artwork of Moldoff, and he needed it. A special Agent for the United states, he would mess around with spies, counter-spies, and beautiful agents in torrid political regions. The plots were lacking in originality, using the old gimmicks which also prevailed in the early Flash tales. For instance, one issue had Cliff fall hook, line, and sinker for a female spy, only to reveal at the end that he knew her secret all along and was just putting her on. No extensive mention of Cornwall will be made in this article, for I don't believe he deserves it, and he soon departed, indicating that others didn't like him, either.

"Don't go 'way, there's still more," might well have been Mayer's trademark, for there were still many more features to come in the jam-packed first issue. One was Johnny Thunder, a supposedly humorous nitwit. Thunder, hexed as a baby, had the power to command a magical thunderbolt when pronouncing the Badhnisian words "Cei-U". Fortunately for Thunder, who didn't know this secret, "Cei-U" comes out as "Say, you--" and the thunderbolt would therefore obey any unkowing wish or command that Thunder made. By late 1940 Thunder was made aware of the existence of the creature, but did not know how to control it until later in the 40's. The art, by Stan Asch, was probably the worst of any FLASH feature. The strip, originally titled "Johnny Thunderbolt", soon became "Johnny Thunder."

Yet another feature in #1 was Whip, which, like Johnny Thunderbolt, was authored by John W. Wentworth. The Whip, in reality an Eastern dude who dons a western mystery costume and Spanish accent, was a roaming adventurer of the Bruce Wayne type who got into the most un-Spanish adventurer situations imaginable, such as fighting crime's clutches within lighthouses and newspaper offices. The art, by one George Storm, was mediocre, and enjoyed little boosting when Homer Fleming took over.

After a two-page text feature, also by Gardner Fox, who nearly made FLASH COMICS "FOX COMICS," and illustrated by Sheldon Mayer (editor of the All American group of ALL STAR COMICS heroes, creator of the popular strip "Scribbly"(which debuted in ALL AMERICAN #1 but didn't become an individual book until 1948), illustrator of "J. Worthington Blimp" from the old publication THE COMICS MAGAZINE, and present day artist of Sugar & Spike), the fabulous Ed Wheelan took over with an 8-page FLASH PICTURE NOVELETTE. Wheelan, the brains behind the drawing board of the popular "Minute Movies" strip, which appeared in the short-lived DC MOVIE COMICS, 1939 version, as well as in the newspapers, drew this feature for some time in FLASH, using his delightful art style and dramas of human nature; composed of one-page "chapters," these novelettes continued until after the demise of MOVIE, when "Minute Movies" replaced it.

There-it was--FLASH #1. But was Mayer satisfied? Indeed not! He continued to add more features. In #2, Rod Ryan of the Sky Police made his first appearence. Ryan, drawn by Paul H. Jepson, was only given 3 pages per issue, and his serialized plots, much in the Flash Gordon-Buck Rogers

The Flash
(JAY GARRICK)
BY
E.E. HIBBARD
AND
GARDNER FOX
R.L.M

line did not last too long.

The next issue of FLASH, #3, sported another new feature: King Standish, Created, as usual, by Gardner Fox, Standish was--let's let the pages of FLASH themselves speak: "A tyrant to the cruel... a benefactor to the weak... like a man whose name is never known, KING STANDISH..."Kink" to the underworld of crime...remains a mystery and a terror to the overlords of vice and murder! His names are legion... his faces myriad!" Errr! At any rate, Standish performed his antics in, of all things, a cheap Halloween mask, bowtie, and tuxedo or similar attire. Whether it was the sartorial splendor or not (it just couldn't have been the art or plotting), King soon zoomed upwards in popularity, enjoying a cover spot on #5 and a place in the earlier issues of COMIC CAVALCADE. Perhaps the reason for his popularity was the extensive use of guns--King was shot in the temple--naturally, it was "just a flesh wound"(!!!)--and used weaponry himself on occasion. The name of the strip, originally King Standish, was soon shortened to just "King."

After these first five issues, things settled down in FLASH, and the line-up became fairly unvarying. By the middle of World War II, however, the line-up changed with a drop in pages. King, Rod Ryan, Cliff Cornwall, and Flash Picture Novelette all were dropped. The roll call by the time FLASH had reached the half-century mark now read: Flash (still authored by Mr Fox, but drawn by E.E. Hibbard, who had taken over from Lampert early in 1940), who had in the interim obtained his own comic, ALL-FLASH QUARTERLY, Johnny Thunder (still written by Wentworth), Whip (illoed by Homer Fleming), Hawkman (still by Fox-Moldoff), Minute Movies (Ed Wheelan's replacement for the Novelette), and a new feature entitled "Ghost Patrol." Written by Wentworth, and illoed by Frank Harry, the group, no relation to today's "Doom Patrol", was composed of "three men who are neither dead nor alive!" Transporting themselves, melting their bodies a la Dr. Solar, and flying through the air with the greatest of ease, the Patrol was rather humorously fulfilling its purpose more than the idiotic Johnny Thunder.

Speaking of the JSA'sm personal moron, he had now joined the service, and in one issue, spanning one day, was involved in the Pacific, war-torn Europe, and a German prison camp.

The only other outstanding development, outside of the discontinuation of Fox's texts (they were replaced by Evelyn Gabriel's stories), was the introduction of the Three Dimwits into the Flash episodes. Since most everyone knows the story of these first-class nuts (a compliment), I won't go into detail, but it should be noted that they appeared in nearly every Flash store there-after, whether in FLASH COMICS or ALL FLASH. In fact, the Dimwits became so popular that for a time they merited a four-page strip in ALL AMERICAN COMICS, the traditional abode of Green Lantern and Dr. Mid-Nite. But their meteoric rise to fame was followed by just as swift a fall, and by 1947 the Dimwits were no more.

In FLASH #62, a historic even took plawe; Joe Kubert took over the Hawkman art. Koldoff had been doing it straight on through from #5, including the Hawk's appearences in ALL STAR COMICS. For some reason, however, Kubert had been given the chance to draw Hawkman in the 1944 BIG ALL AMERICAN COMIC, and this proved to be Shelly's downfall. Kubert became the permanent artist in #62--incidentally, Hawkgirl, originally just Hawkman's girl friend, had now donned costume and was in the midst of all brawls with the Winged Wonder--and remained there for a long, long time.

In 1949, the Sheldon Mayer line of ALL AMERICAN COMICS GROUP (FLASH, GREEN LANTERN, ALL STAR, ALL AMERICAN, SENSATION, WONDER WOMAN, COMIC CAVALCADE, BUTT & JEFF, etc.) broke away from the DC line as a, and for several issues FLASH bore the All-American symbol on the cover instead of the traditional Superman-DC circle. For the duration of this short breakaway, FLASH went on a 8-times-a-year schedule instead of the previous monthly (because of War Paper Shortage) before returning to the DC group and the usual frequency.

The next important change came in 1947, and there were two. By this time, Whip and Minute Movies had been discontinued, and, in FLASH #86, the Black Canary made her first appearence! The soon-to-be Justice Society member debuted in the Johnny Thunder strip. She continued to guest star in #'s 87,88, & 89, and, after a one-issue vacation, returned in the 91st issue. With #92, Thunder was gone forever (hoorah!). The Black Canary had been welcomed on the cover by Flash and Hawkman, and was apparently welcomed by fans, too, for she became a JSA member in ALL STAR #38 and continued with a series of ALL STAR COMICS. She also remained in FLASH until its last issue, #104. The artist of Black Canary was Carmine Infantino, who had taken over the Ghost Patrol. Kubert was still doing Hawkman, and Lee Elias had taken over Flash. But back to the Canary--authored by Robert Kanigher, she quickly rose in popularity, and in #95 appeared in as many pages of FLASH as the Flash himself.

The next issue of FLASH, #87, saw Paul Reinman's Atom move in. The original Atom, a real half-pint, had no powers other than unusual strength and dexterity. A refugee from ALL AMERICAN COMICS, Atom was a minor character in the 40's, and understandably so. Given only 5 pages in FLASH, some of his feats, such as flipping a loaded buoy over fifty yards--with his feet, yet, were far too short.

Summer, 1948 saw perhaps the saddest even in comicdom's annals, for Sheldon Mayer was replaced by Whitney Ellsworth as editor of the All American group. Ellsworth let FLASH continue for a little under a year, and then dropped it. GREEN LANTERN, ALL FLASH, ALL AMERICAN, and COMIC CAVALCADE fared no better, with some of them lasting only one or two issues F.W., as his first names appeared in the ownership notices.

And so, with #104, on sale in December of 1948, FLASH COMICS joined many other proud anthologies in oblivion. Some of the characters, such as Flash, Atom, Hawkman, and Black Canary would continue until December, 1951, in ALL STAR. Others, like the members of the Ghost Patrol, the Whip, King, and all the rest, would never return.

Looking over the lifetime of the original FLASH COMICS, one finds what one looks for--villainy, artwork, and originality, all in ample amounts. The Thinker, The Fiddler, Star Sapphire, Thorn, and many others pestered Flash in either FLASH or ALL FLASH in their lifetimes, but this topic has already been covered extensively in another fanzine. In the beginning years, Flash's tales were more "human interest." if they could be called such, with a new set of characters each story, but with the Dimwits, Jean Williams, and Flash in each and every one. Hawkman had his foes, too, but the Atom and Black Canary concerned themselves with petty criminals and the eradication or ordinary crime. (Indeed, why not? They didn't have the powers that the Hawk and Flash did, only strength and, in the case of the Black Cat-imitating Black Canary, mastery of judo and great dexterity.) Wrtwork? We've already seen the fine work of Infantino, Koldoff, Kubert, Elias, Wheelan, Reinman, Wheelan, and more in the pages of FLASH. As for originality, I doubt that there is a single fan who can claim he was familiar with the time) of Flash or Hawkman. Of course, originality was not the case with Black Canary, and the Atom had no terrific origin or powers, but the fresh plotting in most cases overcame this imbalance.

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The readers of SHOWCASE--that is, those who were left after the first 3 issues, might have shrugged off #4, for the feature was a new super-hero called 'Flas'. Battling foes such as the Turtle--a revival, by the way--and Mazdan, the super-speedster swept back in the DC vaults again after this one appearence. After more 'winners' and a new feature by Kirby entitled Challengers of the Unknown, #8 starred Flash again. Another foe, the Icicle from Green Lantern, was revived in the form of Captain Cold, but he, too, was taken away, and again Flash sped into cold storage. What was keeping Ellsworth? Nearly another year went by, possibilities of Flash's own comic, before #13, in which Flash fought Mr. Element and went "Around the World in 80 Minutes." Flash got a break though, and reappeared in #14. A break? With the usual array of alien threats and a corny rehash of the Mr. Element plot, this time as Dr. Alchemy? One would think that such an offering would be refused as had all previous WW SHOWCASE features save Lois Lane and Challengers of the Unknown. But,no, indiscriminate comic buyers saved the day for once and Flash was a success! #105 came out in December, 1958, starring the origin of the Mirror Master, and was followed on a bi-monthly frequency by #106 with Grodd, #107, again with the Gorilla Genius, #108, once more with Grodd (making three issues in a row; actually, he shared #106 with Pied Piper, #109 with a return of the Mirror Master, #110 with the origin of the Weather Wizard and origin of Kid Flash, #111, and so forth.

As all fans know, the team of Infantino-Broome-Schwartz has handled the modern FLASH COMICS, which unlike the original, stars only members of the "Flash family," Flash, Kid Flash, and Elongated Man (who as of this writing has yet to go off on a real solo, Mr. Schwartz!) with minor exceptions in personel. One was the (choke) Dimwits again, brought back by Schwartz during a moment of incredible super-gall, and authored by Fox. Thank Heavens Gardner's enthusiasm was thwarted by the barrage of fan mail heavily against the idiots. But he was back swinging again with #123, the first "Flash of Two Worlds" epic, and enjoyed a repeat in #129 and #137. While Anderson and Giella have chalked up most of the modern Flash's inking, Joe Kubert inked the first issue.

There we have it--FLASH COMICS. We can all thank our lucky stars it is still going strong, for it is one of the best products, issue-for-issue, which has been and is being produced by National.

THE END

ACE MAGAZINES INC. INTRODUCED A NEW CHARACTER IN THE EARLY 40'S WHEN THEY BROUGHT OUT THE 1ST ISSUE OF SURE-FIRE COMICS (LATER RE-NAMED LIGHTNING COMICS) — AND THEY CALLED HIM "FLASH" LIGHTNING. LATER THEY CHANGED THE "FLASH" TO "LASH". LIGHTNING ALSO APPEARED IN THE '4-FAVORITES' COMICS, ACE'S ANSWER TO D.C.'S "ALL-STAR" AND FAWCETT'S "AMERICA'S GREATEST" COLLECTION OF STARS.

THE NEDOR COMICS GROUP

reprinted from
FANTASY HEROES HANGOUT 1

BY MARTY ARBUNICH

The Nedor Comic Group was one of the most famous and renown comic publishers of the 40's. At one time or another they created just about as many super and costumed heroes as the larger, more well-known publishers--Fawcett, Timely, DC, ect. On the following pages to review all their costume hero comics--STARTLING, EXCITING, THRILLING, AMERICA'S BEST, WONDER, etc., but they also published a number of others, which will not be covered, such as: COO-COO, BARNYARD, REAL LIFE, HAPPY, GOOFY, IT REALLY HAPPEND, and a few others. The Nedor Group also published pulp magazines that were related to science fiction and fantasy. Here are just some of the titles: THRILLING WONDER STORIES, POPULAR WESTERN, THE GHOST-SUPER DETECTIVE, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, CAPT. FUTURE-WIZARD OF SCIENCE, THE IONE EAGLE, THRILLING LOVE, YOUR ~~XMX~~ PROPHECY, STRANGE STORIES, and others. As you can see, Nedor certainly published plenty of literature for every age and taste.. The Nedor Group also went under the name of Better Publications, just as DC also goes under the name of National.

Nedor has some fine men in their stable of artists during their thirteen year reign. Among them were Jack Binder, who usually did Fighting Yank; Maurice Gutwirth, who concentrated mainly on the Four Comrades; John Blummer--he occasionally draw the Yank and later went on to DC to illustrate some of the King strips; Robert Oksner, who drew the Commando Cubs and also went on to DC where he worked on such strips as the Ghost Patrol and Justice League of America; Ralph Mayo--worked on Cathy and then moved on to DC where he worked on the Johnny Quick strip; Frank Frazetta, who drew one of Nedor's comical hits--Looie Lazybones, and later The Shining Knight at DC. And still another Nedor artist who later moved to DC to draw some of the Roy Raymond stories,was Ruben Moreira. While at Nedor he worked mainly in THRILLING COMICS.

Now that I have briefly gone over the skeletal structure of this Company, more detailed information on their various comics follows. But I would like to end this introduction with one last phrase: "The Nedor Comic Group is one of the companies that put comics in the hearts of many collectors in the world today"

THRILLING COMICS

THRILLING was the first comic publication by Nedor. Appearing in February of 1940, it seemed a rather dull magazine and contained no super heroes. But at this point, this type of comic was just coming into its own. But by #8 this monthly publication had introduced the renowned Doc Strange. Strange was one of Nedor's typical superman, with every power available except x-ray vision. Despite his many similarities with other super heroes, Doc Strange was original in other ways. He was one of the first heoes of any company to reveal his secret identity while in his super guise. His costume consisted of blue "riding breeches", a red skin-tight (what else? baggy?) T-shirt, and brown boots. Even though his costume (which was just about identical with CRACK COMICS' Capt. Triumph) did not seem particularly appealing, his stories and action evidently was. Doc Strange received his super brute strength when he found a magigal distillate, Alosun, which yields super normal powers,

Another pair of heroes who appeared in THRILLING COMICS were The Ghost and The Woman in Red. The Ghost was a master magician, alias George Chance. Aided by the beautiful Betty

THRILLING
COMICS
AT
10¢
No. 35
DOC STRANGE
FEATURING A COMPLETE
"DOC STRANGE" ACTION ADVENTURE

Morris, who was transported from the 18th century through a time machine of a mad professor, the Ghost haunted out and found the root of all crime. The Woman in Red, another crime-fighter similar to the Ghost in her style, was garbed in a full-length red gown with a red cowl and mask.

Co-featured with this trio were; The Rio Kid, The Lone Eagle, Dan Duffy and Nickie Norton.

A new hero, the American Crusader, was introduced in THRILLING COMICS #19, August 1941. His origin was briefly told in an 18 page story. At Grand University Professor Archibald Masters experimented on his secret theory with an atom smasher. However, the smasher back fired and Masters was sent to the hospital near death and in a deep coma. One night, while on his "death bed" and still in a coma, the Professor mysteriously jumped to his feet with a spark of concealed energy. Since no one was in the room, he decided to leave the hospital and head for the University to investigate his notes. As fate would have it, Masters was affronted on the street by a man intent on relieving him of his valuables. The Professor resisted, however, and the crook conked him over the head with the butt of his gun, but with no effect! The assailant then fired his pistol at him but the bullet simply bounced off his invincible chest. In a rage of fury, the shartled Masters belted the thug with his bare fist and knocked him unconscious. He noticed the police approaching, Masters, baffled and fearing being discharged from the University for being in a street brawl, with a spurt of energy, took to the air and headed for his apartment. Still unable to believe his new powers, he tested them further, until he came to the conclusion that when the atom smasher went off it accidently rearranged his atomic structure, giving him almost unlimited power!! He decided to use his strangly acquired power for the good of mankind so he buys parts of a custume, piece by piece, and fanally assembled it his American Crusader disguise. He also fought his first battle against crime in THRILLING #19. And in #21, he gained a young partner, Mike.

Hale of the Herald was soon introduced in this comic. Hale, ace reporter for "The Herald," frequently ran into interesting predicaments against crime and criminals. He was armed with a strange compound that yielded chemical invisibility. In THRILLING #26 (March, 1942), Hale battled The Dark Archer, whom prowled around stabbing his helpless victims with his perilous arrows, Invisibly, Hale tried to take on the Dark Archer and company but the effects of Hale's invisibility drugs wears off and the battle against the gang developes into a harassing feud until the decision fell in the favor of Hale.

Lucky Lawrence, Leatherneck and Jimmy Cole, boy sleuth, soon made off on an adventure in THRILLING, replacing some of that comics' minor heroes--The Rio Kid, etc.

In THRILLING COMICS #33, February 1943, Doc Strange and Mike matched brawn against a villain named Mephisto, who was dressed in a solid red "devil" costume. He was very similar in appearence to Black Satan, the villain who frequented the Four Comrades strip in STARTLING.

Nothing new happened (no principal changes) until issue #36, July, 1943, when the Commando Cubs were introduced. This made the second junior crime fighting team for Nedor--the other being the Four Comrades.

The Commando Cubs were five in number and their names were Whizzer Malarky, Spud O'Shea, Horace Cosgrove II, Ace Browning, and a negro companion Pokey Jones. Together, these five frequently stepped out of their school-boy roles and smashed the Nazi as the Commando Cubs.

When The Woman in Red returned, after a short absence, in THRILLING #34, she showed obvious changes in her costume. Her long gown was now a short skirt, she shed her cowl, altered her mask, and donned a flashy red cape.

Since issue 36, the Commando Cubs had shared the cover scene off and on with Dr. Strange. However, the Cubs usually won out.

The Commando Cubs were strictly military characters. All of their stories dealt with the Nazis, who they acclaimed as their chief enemy. Their uniforms were that of a typical soldiers' but on a smaller scale, of course.

The Cubs and Doc Strange were slowly edging The American Crusader out of the limelight, and he made his last appearence in #43, August 1944. By issue 43, it was quite evident that the Commando Cubs were the top feature in THRILLING. Shomburg (one of the very best cover artists in the forties) had been doing a great majority of THRILLING's covers. And now that the covers featured the Commando Cubs, a military group, Shomburg seemed to be doing more and more of the covers. He was best at this type, as can be seen by the many, many covers he did for many of Nedor's comics.

The Ghost, who had made frequent appearences, made his last stand in THRILLING COMICS #51, December, 1945.

Because the Commando Cubs were strictly war fighters, they were no longer needed now that the war was coming to an end. Their main task, to defeat the Nazis, had been accomplished and they bowed out in issue 52, February 1946.

Now the the Commando Cubs, the Ghost, and The American Crusader had departed (leaving only Doc Strange), Nedor began introducing a number of post-war characters to fill in. The first of these was The Phantom Detective--chemist Dr. Bendix--who came on the scene in #53. In his top hat and narrow mask, the Phantom Detective hunted down the criminals of the underworld. Also in the same issue, The Cavalier made his first appearence. When Rance Raliegh learned of the strange death of his friend, he donned the disguise of the gleaming swordsman known as The Cavalier! He was, however, just another typical hero.

In issue 55, August 1946, the Commando Cubs made a surprise comeback, but this time they were crime-fighters instead of Kraut-fighters. Even though they were welcome sights, it seemed fairly obvious that they would never reach the pinacle of esteem that they held when the war was in its' thickest.

Also in this issue, the Cavalier failed to make an appearence and he was the only THRILLING character who did not last more two issues. However, somebody had to make room for the Cubs to move back in, and the Cavalier was tapped.

Princess Pantha, THRILLING's first jungle feature was introduced in #56. The Princess and Dana (Pantha's boy-friend) lived in the Jungle settling any disorders that arose. Also, in 56, Lucie Lazy Bones, a comical hillbilly, made his debut in THRILLING.

Princess Pantha seemed to becoming a pretty good character..so good, in fact, that she overtook Doc Strange and The Commando Cubs. Soon, after issue 59, April 1947, Doc Strange and

the new Commando Cubs fell off into Limbo land one by one until Pantha had the whole comic magazine to herself.

Shomburg, who had been doing a great many of the covers of THRILLING and other Nedor Publications, gave himself a new pen name after issue #62--XELA.

The super hero reign of THRILLING seemed to be over. A new style of comic literature was taking over. Princess Pantha was being illustrated by Artie Saaf...soon Looie Lazy Bones was being drawn by the well know Frank Frazetta, who also did some inking on the Kathy strip, another THRILLING "comic" character. The Phantom Detective was still being featured regularly in THRILLING but was just a secondary feature--Princess Pantha was the star. In issue #71, April 1949, Ruben Moreira (who later continued his work for other companies) drew a strip entitled The Ghost Bandit.

With no super heroes in their midst, THRILLING was all funny and jungle strips. And then, almost one year later, THRILLING COMICS published its final issue.

S T A R T L I N G C O M I C S

One of the spotlights of the Nedor Group was STARTLING COMICS and issue #1 was dated June 1940. The cover featured a shot of Captain Future, STARTLING's first hero, who received his strange powers by crossing the path of infra-red and gamma rays. Capt. Future, alias Dr. Andrew Bryant-engineer-, used his strangely achieved powers in his battle against crime and later against the Nazis. Other minor characters in the first issue were Dr. X, G-Man,Dalton, Bob and Beard, Sgt. Detective Burke, Masked Rider, Scoop Fangdom, and Mystico.

Soon the war broke out and STARTLING helped to combat the Nazis by creating a new hero who proved to be more well liked than Capt Future--Fighting Yank. His origin, which was 15 pages in length, was in STARTLING #10. Bruce Carter III finds that he is an exact replica in all physical aspects as his ancestor, of the Revolutionary War, Bruce Carter I. His ancient ancestor always came to the aid of his country when it was in danger. The ancestor, in spirit form, tells Bruce he can help his country by combating evil as the Fighting Yank. He tells Bruce of an ancient cloak that possess strange and awesome powers. Bruce finds the cloak and these powers are energized into his body, thus a new hero is born.

Shortly after issue 12, Nedor decided to introduce a junior crime-fighters group, similar to the ones being created by other publishers. They couldn't have created a finer group than The Four Comrades. With Maurice Gutwirth doing the drawing, the Four Comrades became a pleasant sight to many a reader. Getting into mischief was the chief occupation of this foursome, and they were pretty good at it. The Four Comrades stuck together through thick and thin and frequently had to elude the clutches of death by their wise and youthful pranks. One villain that the boys seemed to bump into quite often was the Black Satan. He threatened the lives of the Four Comrades in issue 17, but as the story ended up, the boys captured all the gang of the Black Satan Syndicate, except the leader.

In issue #18 another new hero was born, Pyroman. Dick Martin, electrical engineer, heads for his pals pool hall after his electrical class at Central Technical School. Upon his arrival, he notices a caped demon named Dizaster. Dizaster's aim was to get a few smart boys to make some quick dough. Dick tells the boys to go straight but a few of Dizasta's henchmen shut up Dick by throwing him through a window. Dizaster tells Dicks pool hall buddies that he is a real estate operator and business has fallen off. He tells the lads that if they would start a fire, he would be able to collect the insurance. Little did the boys know that they are only decoys. While they are starting a minor fire in the east part of town, Dizasta is busy in the west part burning down an Army warehouse, thus keeping the fire department busy on the east side where the boys are. Dick spots the warehouse fire and also a man trapped in it; Martin rushes in and saves the man. Dick Martin knows the causes of the fire his ex-buddies try to kill him by electrocute him but he survives. Dick discovers that the gang plans to strike again so the police. But the arsonist escapes and because of Dick's prescence there, they arrest him. He is later convicted and sentenced to die in the electric chair. As the switch on the chair is thrown, the charge unites with the previous shock he received, and Dick jumps up, plows through the wall and heads for his home. There, donning an old masquerade costume, with his electrical charged body, he sets out and captures the arsonist, but arch-worker of evil, Dizasta, escapes. Using this outfit as his crime-fighting costume, Dick Martin portrays the role of Pyroman!!

STARTLING COMICS #18 was the beginning of a pinnacle of hero perfection. STARTLING was now featuring 4 top heroes; Pyroman, Fighting Yank, Four Comrades, and Capt, Future. The Four Comrades battled the Black Satin again is this issue, and also in #20 and 21. Starting with #19, Pyroman and Fighting Yank alternated front covers.

By #29 it was becoming evident that STARTLING's interior art was deteriorating. 90% of the covers were by Shomburg but there were countless numbers of unskilled artists doing work in the inside.

The "Fighting Foursome" had fought crime without the entrance of a new hero since #18. Issue 34 brought new competition for them, though, when a new hero entered upon the scene, The Scarab. Peter Ward, archeologist, was lost in the desert when he came upon the ancient tomb of the cat god. In it he found a scroll and a ring which would transform him into The Scarab. However, this is the only issue of STARTLING he appeared in.

The Four Comrades were to appear in only one more issue, #36, (they were also absent in #35) with Pyroman, Fighting Yank, and Capt Future. Their place was taken over by Don Davis-espionage agent and The Oracle.

When World War II was over, many comics were left in a rut and STARTLING was ne exception. There were no more Japs or Nazis for Pyroman, Fighting Yank, and Capt Future to battle. What else could these characters do? Not even Nedor could answer the question. Capt. Future made his last appearence in issue 40, after appearing in every previous issue.

No. 33
STARTLING
MAY
COMICS

E X C I T I N G C O M I C S

Another publication of the Nedor Group was EXCITING. Debuting in February, 1940, this comic contained some of Nedor's greatest heroes. Such remarkable spectaculars as The Black Terror, The American Eagle, The Liberator, The Scarab, and others decorated the pages of this fine publication.

When the Black Terror made his debut in EXCITING HE became its number one hero and led all the action. Though his origin was quite dull, he made his fans by his action-filled battles. The Black Terror, alias druggest Bob Benton, received his super-human powers when he was experimenting with formic ethers. These ethers caused drastic changes in the life of Bob Benton as he shortly thereafter donned the diguise of "The Black Terror!"

EXCITING was at first a monthly comic, but with issue #5 it switched too 9 times a year. EXCITING COMICS was not a particularly until Black Terror was introduced in the 9th issue, May 1941. The Black Terror and Tim had no unusual super power, just that of a typical 'super-man'. Soon, however, other heroes joined him. The Mask and the Sphinx were the first to join and did so in #13, October 1941. The Sphinx, however, lasted only the one issue. #15 had The Liberator in his first comic book appearence. His costume, which was similar to that of Capt.

Future and Doc Strange, consisted of red shorts, a blue T-shirt with white stars on it, and boots--his legs were bare. His powers, again, were of the symbolic 'super-man' type--super strength, speed, flight, and a meek alter ego. His secret identity was Dr. Nelson Drew, who stumbled across an Egyptian formula that transformed him into that "Fichter For Democracy," The Liberator!

In issue 20, July 1942, The Mask saw his final appearence, due to lack of ~~it~~ reader appeal. A few of the other minor strips had appeared off and on up until now were Crash Carter, Pepper Swift, Ted Crane, Sgt. Bill King, and a few others.

In EXCITING COMICS #22, October 1942, another new hero came into view--The American Eagle. However, this first story, which also included his young partner Eaglet, did not contain his origin--he was also spotlighted on this cover. In regards to artwork, 4 different artists headled this strip at one time or another, in EXCITING alone! They were Maurice Gutwirth, Richard Hughes, Kiro, and one that is unknown.

By the 25th issue the publication schedule had gone to monthly. Starting about #28, Crime Crushers, a detective strip, began to make off and on appearences. In issue #30, December 1943, The American Eagle and Eaglet went up against a Nazi spy ring, but our bhampions are subdued and chained to a wall. The Nazis plan was to take the two heroes costumes and wear them when they blew up the White House, thereby placing the blame on The Eagle. The bombs are planted, however, in the meantime the two escape, capture the Nazis, and the American Eagle finds the hidden bombs just in the nick of time!!

Also is #30, the Liberator made his final appearence in EXCITING COMICS, although he was still being seen in AMERICA'S BEST. Now, there were only two top stars in EXCITING--Black Terror and American Eagle.

The American Eagle was not in #39, but another new strip entered...Kara the Jungle Princess. Jane Howell and Kit Kendall are mysteriously mistaken by a primitive jungle tribe as their long lost Prince and Princess. Both consent to the tribe's wishes and become their royal leaders.

The American Eagle returned again in #40 and remained until #51. In issues 41 and 42, The American Eagle and Eaglet battle the Red Mask, a murderous fiend (what other kind is there?) and the White Angels, a peculiar name for a band of villains. And in issue #42, December 1945, The Scarab made an adventuresome leap into the pages of EXCITING and in #44 he conquered the Black Titan-Nubo, an Egyptian giant. By issue #51, however, both The American Eagle and The Scarab had breathed their last breath in a comic book.

Miss Masque, a super heroine, stalked crime as a scourge of the underworld in EXCITING COMICS #53. She was attired in a solidm red costume and mask. Miss Masque and Roger Dodger (a funny strip) took the place of American Eagle and The Scarab. Even though the Black Terror and Tim were still appearing regularly, it was only a matter of time before they too were dropped, because the trend toward jungle and funny strips was also overtaking EXCITING. However, it is undeniable that it was the costume heroes that that made EXCITING COMICS.

B L A C K T E R R O R C O M I C S

The Black Terror and his fellow companion Tim, along with Fighting Yank and Doc Strange, were Nedor's most popular heroes. This point was made even clearer because aside from appearing in several other comics, they also appeared in their own book.

BLACK TERROR #1 was dated February, 1940, which means it was probably on the newstands in late December of 1939. Even though this magazine was published quarterly, it had to be one of Nedor's most popular comics.

Like Lev Gleason's Daredevil, Black Terror (and Tim) had a very unique and striking costume. Solid black with white skull and crossbones on the chest. Rather odd for a hero, but it was probably supposed to strike fear into the criminals in much the same way as Batman did with his use of the bat emblem.

Despite their peculiar costumes, Black Terror and Tim used their power in behalf of their beloved country, America. Since the war was on during the Black Terror's reign, it was quite reasonable that his chief adversaries would be the Nazis and Japs. But on occasions, he did fight mad scientists and "uncontrollable beasts" too.

In issue 6 the two heroes did battle with Dr. Kambi and his world-conquering zombies. The Zombies seemed unstopable as they rampaged through the cities, but the wit and courage of the Black Terror and his buddy Tim, proved more devastating as they defeated the Zombies with the use of flame-throwers. And in issue 11, the Black Terror claimed victory over a hideous fiend, the Voice, and his gang. In the previous issue, #10, another evil scientist entered the scene. His goal in life was to have limitless power. To help him, he stole a giant untamed gorilla but in the end he met his inescapable fate.

It is unfortunate that BLACK TERROR COMICS was not published monthly, although,M Nedor probably figured he was getting ample exposure by appearing in 3 comics.

F I G H T I N G Y A N K C O M I C S

The Yank (who, along with the Black Terror, was Nedor's most popular character) was so sensational in STARTLING COMICS that he was given his own magazine, which was published quarterly. The first issue was dated August, 1942. As mentioned before, he received his powers from his revolutionary war hero ancester, who bestowed them on him.

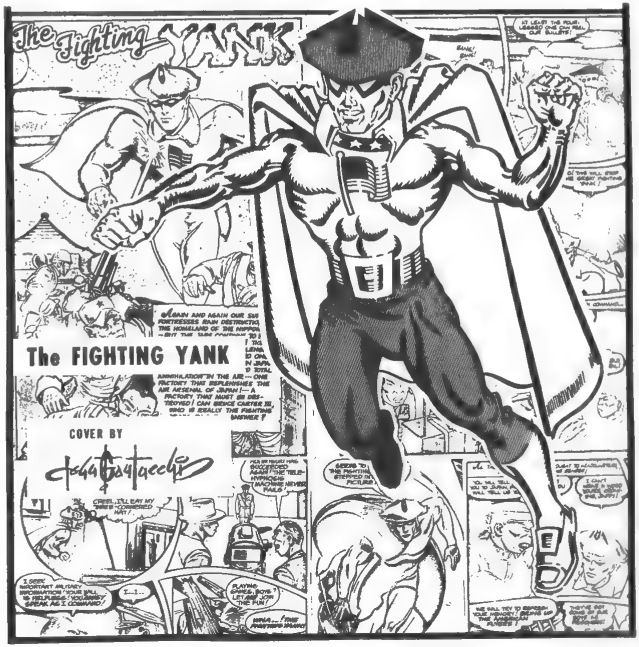
The Fighting Yank was fortunate to be one of comicdom's few heroes who really had a unique costume. At a time when it still considered right to take great pride in being patriotic, this was about the most patriotic hero you could conjure up. The Yank's main purpose was to fight America's enemies. Many times when Fighting Yank was up against impossible odds and things seemed doomed his spirit ancestor would appear and say something like, "Your country needs you my son, her enemies are threatening--you MUST fight on." And with this extra push, the Yank always managed to win out for his beloved country. (EDITORS NOTE: Although, that dialogue may sound corny, today--to some people anyway, I don't mind saying that even today, I think it is still inspiring. And for something insiring to come out of a comic--well, it certainly speaks well of the media.)

Although the Yank spent most of his time fighting Japs and Nazis, he also fought against subversion at home, and a mad scientist here and there.

W O N D E R C O M I C S

This was one of the late comers to the Nedor group with the first issue being dated May, 1944. The first super hero to appear in this comic was featured in the first issue--The Grim Reaper. His name seems a bit on the mystic side but he actually wasn't this kind of hero at all. His costume consisted on a white skin tight shirt, purple riding breeches, a purple cape with a skull and crossbones on it, and purple cowl-type mask.

Wonder, unfortunately, was one of Nedor's less popular magazines. The Grim



Reaper was the only costume hero in the early issues--the rest being detective stories or comical features. Some of these were Tim Dawson-soldier of fortune, The Supersleuths, and Sherluck Jones.

In issue 7, Jan. 1946, a new super hero detective was introduced--Spectro. He had the power to read minds and he used his powers toward the elimination of crime.

The real breakthrough in WONDER COMICS came in the 8th issue, when a new science fiction hero came into being--Wonderman. His first story, in #8, was quite interesting. A mad professor named Dr. Voodoo, a genius of Lilith, invented a machine known as the vacuum spiral, but Wonderman managed to gain control of it on Earth. But on Lilith, the professor makes another similar machine and by operating the machine in reverse it manifests the power to move objects from place to place. Dr. Voodoo is aching to get back at Wonderman for taking control of his first machine he created. With his second machine he plans to pull our hero back to Lilith, and does so. The Doctor and his ferocious Antrozoons (similar to crocodiles but they stand upright) try to overpower Wonderman but he escapes. After a knockdown and dragout battle with the Antrozoons Wonderman manages to return to Earth and in the proceedings explodes the satellite of Lilith, ending the threat of Dr. Voodoo and his vacuum spiral.

Wonder Comics, after the 8th issue, seemed to turn more and more toward science fiction with Wonderman leading the way. This hero seemed to be patterned after the Flash Gordon type character. Unfortunately this comic ran little more than 20 issues.

A M E R I C A ' S B E S T

The first issue of this comic was dated February 1942, but was only published quarterly. Obviously it was probably Nedor's best comic because it featured their best characters--Black Terror, Fighting Yank, Doc Strange, Pyroman, Captain Future, The Liberator, and The American Eagle. Although these characters usually alternated stories, the Black Terror, Fighting Yank, and Doc Strange were cover-featured the most. The main drawback of many of Nedor's heroes was the throwing in of a kid partner. And except for the Black Terror and Tim, these young partners seemed out of place. Fortunately Fighting Yank was one of the characters who escaped this curse. Unfortunately, Doc Strange and The American Eagle did not.

In AMERICA'S BEST #5 (April 1943) Doc Strange and Mike did combat with a ghastly creature named The Ghoul, a Nazi agent. He bore a strange resemblance to Timely's Red Skull in that he wore a skull-like headpiece. The source of the Ghoul's power was a ring which he plucked from an eye of an Incan idol. One punch from his "ring worn" fist and his opponent was out cold. However, Doc and Mike managed to dodge the power-packed punches of The Green Ghoul as they struck back with a few blows of their own.

In issue 13 The Black Terror and Tim appeared in quite an interesting predicament. Both were subdued by gang of hoods. The pair were tired and set in a room full of half starved vultures with poison beaks. Naturally, they escaped--as to how, well maybe we had not better tell you ends to all the stories, you might buy the comic some day.

Also in #13, Doc Strange came face to face with "The Miner." This villain wore a typical miner's helmet with the light on it. But the light was not typical--aside from causing temporary blindness with its painful ray, it could also cause hynosis at The Miner's will. This villain, a Nazi agent (naturally) had managed to get an Argentine Inventor, Senor Escobar, under his hypnotic influence, but not for long, as Doc Strange and Mike came to the rescue.

By issue 14 one of Nedor's most popular heroes had made his debut in AMERICA'S BEST COMICS. "America's bravest Defender", Fighting Yank became so popular in this comic that he replaced Captain Future and The Liberator. During all this time, some minor characters--Woman in Red, Secret Ace, The Lone Eagle, etc.--had been making off and on appearences.

After about the 16th issue, Nedor cut down the number of pages in each issue and, of course, the number of stories. Soon after this, the comic began to slip and was to last only about 10 more issues with the last being #31.

However, it cannot be denied that AMERICA'S BEST was one of Nedor's finest, if not THE finest, comic books.

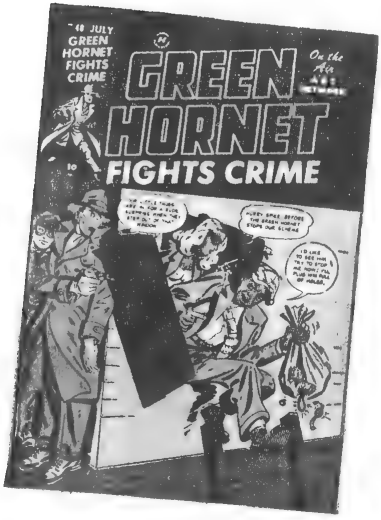
THE END

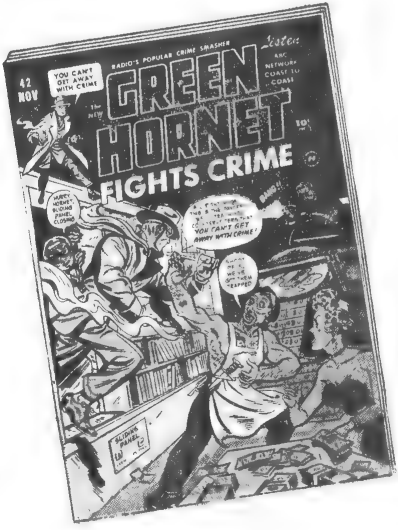
The SCARAB
AN EXPEDITION TO EGYPT PROVIDES SOMETHING MORE EXCITING THAN ANCIENT MUMMIES FOR YOUNG ARCHAEOLOGIST PETER WARD -- WHO, AS THE MIGHTY SCARAB, BECOMES THE FIRST CONQUEROR OF THE BLACK TITAN, NUBO!

10¢
America's
BEST
COMICS
NO. 21
ALSO
THE FIGHTING YANK
PYROMAN
10¢
BEST
COMICS

BLACK CAT
THE DARLING OF COMICS
WELL HERE GOES!

HOLLYWOOD'S GLAMOROUS DETECTIVE STAR
BLACK CAT
THE DARLING OF COMICS


JULY
GREEN HORNET FIGHTS CRIME
GREEN HORNET
On the Air
FIGHTS CRIME


RADIO'S POPULAR CRIME SMASHER
NOV
YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH CRIME
GREEN HORNET
FIGHTS CRIME

A CAPSULE HISTORY OF E.C.'S "WEIRD SCIENCE" by Bill Spicer

reprinted from THE ROCKET'S BLAST #16.

During the early months of 1950 the Fables Publishing Co., under the editorship of William M. Gaines, came out with two new science-fiction comic books titled WEIRD SCIENCE and WEIRD FANTASY. Both of these "New Trend" publications were responsible for the quick-to-follow surge of numerous s-f and fantasy comics.

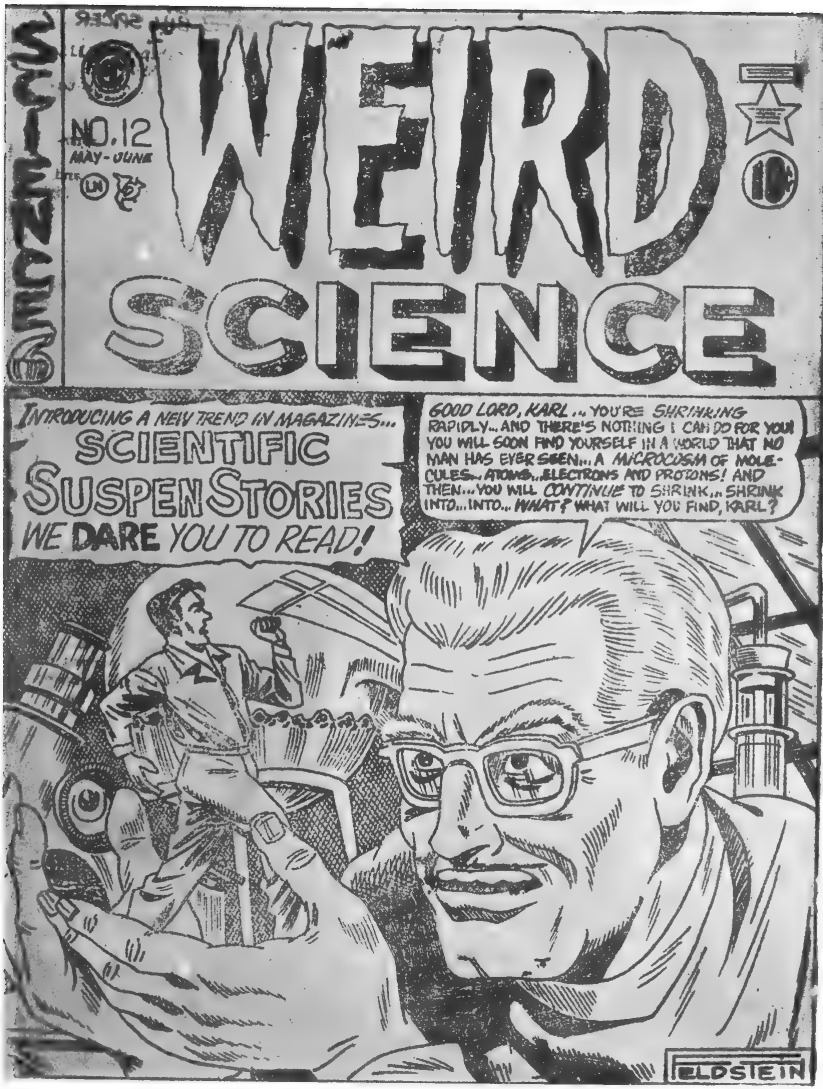
The cover illustration of the initial issue of WEIRD SCIENCE, by Al Feldstein, is reproduced along with this article. Although the issue bears "No. 12" on its cover, it was actually No. 1; practically all of E.C.'s New Trend comic books were changes of titles and formats of already existing comics--mostly cowboy, romance, and crime stories. After five issues, WEIRD SCIENCE finally switched to an accurate numbering system and from the 6th issue onward, the comics bore their proper number.

The first issue of WEIRD SCIENCE contained EC's usual format of four stories. Harvey Kurtzman led off with a tale called "Lost in the Microcosm," which he illustrated and adapted from a science-fiction short story that deals with the well-known theme of the "shrinking man." The second story was illustrated by Wally Wood, and was something of a satire on a comic book artist's dreams becoming material for his "inspired" artwork. His editor and publisher,"Gill Baines," enthusiastically shows the pages to the other artists, "Windsor" and "Newton." Wood's contribution to this issue was titled "Dream of Doom." The third story was illustrated by Jack Kamen and was called"Experiment in Death." The script, by Feldstein, dealt with a scientist's effort to inject a "fatal air-bubble into the blood stream and later on render this bubble harmless within the victim's heart" by means of "high frequency" sound waves. Unfortunately, the scientist experimentsw on one of his cohorts and discovers the treatment destroys the injectee's brain-cells. The four and final story, "Things From Outer Space," was written and drawn by Al Feldstein--it is based on one of his favorite themes: aliens from outer space taking over the identities of military and political officials.

From this relatively crude beginning, WEIRD SCIENCE continued to improve its content in story material and artwork. Al Feldstein, in particular, contanually strived to turn out better and better scripts, and was soon writing all the stories for both WEIRD SCIENCE and its companion magazine, WEIRD FANTASY. With the second issue he assumed the duties of "associate editor" and by issue #8 he took over officially as editor. He continued to illustrate a story in each issue of WEIRD SCIENCE up to and including number 8, plus cover illoes for all these numbers. After assuming full-time editorship with #8, Feldstein turned over the cover artwork and lwad-story to Wally Wood who handled these duties for each succeeding issue (with the single exception of #11 which featured a cover by Feldstein). The early issues contained artwork by just four regular artists: Feldstein, Wood, Kurtzman, and Kamen. Then Graham Ingles made an appearence in number 4. Later on, in number 8, George Roussos did one story, but evidently his art did not "catch on" and he didn't do any subsequent stories. Issue number 9 contained a story illustrated by an artist named Olesen--it was his sole contribution to either of the two s-f titles. WEIRD SCIENCE #10 marked the initial appearence of Joe Orlando, whose work proved popular enough to earn him a permanent spot on EC's staff of artists. He continued to illustrate a story in every issue. Other artists that were eventually to make an appearence in WEIRD SCIENCE were Bill Elder, Al Williamson, George Evans, and Sid Check.

Beginning with #17, WEIRD SCIENCE started featuring adaptations of short stories by Ray Bradbury. This issue contain "The Long Years." Later issues included adaptations of "The Third Expedition," "The One Who Waits," "Changeling," "Marionettes, Inc.," and "Outcast of the Stars."

The final issue of WEIRD SCIENCE was dated Nov.-Dec. 1953, after publishing 22 issues. EC's two science-fiction comic books were then combined into a single title. UNDER the new title of WEIRD SCIENCE-FANTASY and later on, INCREDIBLE SCIENCE FICTION, EC publish 10 more issues, then it was finally discontinued after #32 in 1955. It was at this time that EC launched its short-lived "New Direction" comics, which lasted an additional one year.


SCIENCE
NO.12
MAY-JUNE
WEIRD
SCIENCE
10¢
INTRODUCING A NEW TREND IN MAGAZINES...
SCIENTIFIC
SUSPENSTORIES
WE DARE YOU TO READ!
GOOD LORD, KARL... YOU'RE SHRINKING RAPIDLY... AND THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO FOR YOU! YOU WILL SOON FIND YOURSELF IN A WORLD THAT NO MAN HAS EVER SEEN... A MICROCOSM OF MOLECULES... ATOMS... ELECTRONS AND PROTONS! AND THEN... YOU WILL CONTINUE TO SHRINK... SHRINK INTO... INTO... WHAT? WHAT WILL YOU FIND, KARL?
ELDSTEIN

SCENES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE

From PUNCH COMICS #19, "Rocketman and Rocketgirl"

Death rode the wings of night and only the moon saw stealthy shadows flit across the graveyards--Only the tombstones heard the muffled crunching of shovels on new turned earth! Rocketman and Rocketgirl were destined for disaster when they tried to solve the riddle of the dead who died again!
Midnight--two forms crouch in the shadows at the entrance to the Featherby Mansion--
Suddenly--
NICK PULLED IT COME ON BOYS!
LET LIZ GIVE HIM THE BUSINESS! SHE KNOWS HOW TO HANDLE 'EM!
ROCKETMAN

SUPERSNIPE

THE BOY WITH THE MOST COMIC BOOKS IN AMERICA

By Tom Fagan

Somehow on Groundhog's Day every year, I think of Koppy McFad. The thought's a pleasent one. You may well ask, who is Koppy McFad?

Anyone in the know can tell you. Anyone that read Street & Smith Publications, Inc. periodicals during the 1940's, that is! For Koppy McFAD was "THE BOY WITH THE MOST COMIC BOOKS IN AMERICA!" You couldn't deny this fact if you were a faithful follower of Koppy. Of course, you had to overlook the fact he didn't own DCs,

ECs, Fawcetts, or even Timelys. No, Koppy was true. He only owned Street & Smiths. At least that's all you ever saw him reading--DOC STRANGE, SHADOW, BLACKSTONE THE SUPER MAGICIAN, TRUE SPORT, and maybe a few others. And from his reading grew his legend. For Koppy McFad wasn't an ordinary eight year old. He was SUPERSNIPE !

To quote from SUPERSNIPE COMICS# vol. 4 #6 (June-July 1948), "To those unfamiliar with our hero, Supersnipe, he is the self-appointed protector of Yapburg--POTENTIALLY, of the entire world! These facts don't show when he is in his schoolboy identity of Koppy McFad, but once he whips open his violen case and makes a lightning change--he becomes the Demon of Justice--SUPERSNIPE!"

Yes, this was Supersnipe. An eight year old in knickers. (Though why in the 40's comic strips, artists persisted in drawing boys with trouser styles past a decade ago, is anyone's guess. Robin suffered the same problem in his early days.

True he played baseball and football. He was an All-American all the way through. However, the discerning reader surmised it was only a prelude. Such as the Phantom had to go through as a youth, strengthening the body, learning sportsman ship and all the rest that goes into making a crimefighter of calibre.

For that was what Koppy wanted to be, you had no doubt of that. Especially when you saw the cover of any of his 52-page, 10-cent magazines. Koppy might be racing a home-made soap box derby racer but the main portion of the cover was occupied with his daydream of herois. Supersnipe, grown to man-size, but still with the facial features of the Grade 2 set, was outfitted in his favorite uniform of tights, trunks, cape, boots and mask--and naturally he was way ahead and out in front with the rest of the drivers looking enviously on. Actually Koppy, in his perennial garb of black knickers, black striped pullover red sweater, and white shirt, was all alone, and just beginning to coast down a long Yapburg hill sidewalk.

But as the television ad says: "Big Ambitions need something to grow on." It wasn't milk in Koppy's case. It was his father's blue lodge cape, a pair of red flannel underwear and a domino mask to hide his eyeball-less eyes. Thus attired, Koppy became a champion of justice, a superdoer, a righter of wrongs, and one of the best things to ever appear in comics.

Koppy McFad was more than a copying fad. He was a brilliant satirical take-off on the popularity of the super heroes of the day. He had everything from a Guess-a-pathic mind to a smell-a-pathic nose. All super powers were his, with the benefit of his imagination--and that was another factor of his greatness--imagination.

Koppy usually carried his crime-fighting costume in his handy violin case. When danger threatened, he would wisk into any convenient place--on oe over the counter of a drugstore soda fountain--to don fighting togs. And if a real case was evident, he wasn't above wearing his costume under his street-clothes. The only trouble was the clothes bunched causing everyone to notice but a hero is a hero, no matter what the circumstances, and Koppy wasn't afraid of his real identity being known. In fact, he gloried in having his picture taken for the "late edition of the Yapburg Times." (And what editor wouldn't like to have a Koppy McFad for copy?)

Though his mentor, The Shadow, wore red and blue, Koppy was obviously a mimeograph of Superman. His costume and daydreams showed that. His mask was merely the guise all true superdoers had to effect.

And like Plastic Man with his Woozy Winks and Green Lantern with Doiby Dickles, our lad Supersnipe had his side kicks. There was Herlock ("It's elementary!") Domes and Ulysses Q. Wacky "Inventor and Genius." To give you an idea of the philosophy of Herlock, who wora a checkered tan suit and Sherlock Holmes type hat, let's steal a shred of conversation between he and Supersnipe. From SUPERSNIPE COMICS Vol. 3 #4, July-Aug. 1946: Supersnipe: "Okay! Fifty-fifty! You handle the deductin' Department an' I take over when it reaches the superdoin' stage!"

Herlock: "Agreed- And sealed in the firm hand clasp of two upholders of justice!" What a combination.

But Ulysses Q. doesn't have to take a back seat by any means. Consider this excerpt: "Through the night, Wacky Works--while his parents wonder worriedly what new horror their offspring is creating." In this case it was to give Supersnipe the powers of an actual super hero. And Wacky succeeded via helium and rubber-patched suit in giving Koppy the ability to fly. But it took the Yapburg fire department and Roxy Adams to get him back to earth again. Roxy accomplished it by deflating the gas-filled clothing with a well-aimed arrow.

Ah, Roxy. She was the one. Able to play sandlot baseball with the best of them, she was no ordinary Tomboy. (In fact, none of Supersnipe's young friends could be termed ordinary.) No, Roxy too, had a secret identity. When the clarion call came to right wrongs, she was Roxy Adams, Girl Guerilla. Her weapons--a trusty bow and a quiver filled with sharpened arrows, some pointed, some suction-cupped, depending on what the occasion called for.

Roxy was the bane of Supersnipe's existence. She was the proverbial pest of his life, always ready with a smile one moment and an arrow in the seat of his pants the next, depending on her whims. Yet Koppy, always condescending, forgave her...he had to, she had just too good an aim with those arrows not to.

Much has been written about epic battles in other comics. True, the tussel between the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner is something to 'marvel' over and the tiff betwixt Spy Smasher and golden-sashed Captain Marvel is 'smashing' but there is

another truly great one.

It too, like Wacky's attempt to help Koppy is to be found in SUPERSNIPE Feb-Mar, 1948. And if you could own only one copy of this comic, this is the one to have. For it featured: SUPERSNIPE MEETS THE RAT!

It begins thusly: "Did you ever stop to think there are some who read comic books and want the villain to win over the hero? We were surprised too, until Koppy "Supersnipe" McFad had the following adventure--"

The scene--the corner drugstore with Koppy reading THE SHADOW (for free). An older kid' also reading for free looks up saying, "BALONEY! The Shadow is afraid of his own shadow!" Naturally these are fighting words and, naturally, a fight ensues. Koppy makes a good showing but inadvertendly breaks the drugstore window. However, the druggist understands, but the older kid--later identified as "that roughneck Stan Powers"--swears vengance. In a scene so reminenscent of so many comics, Stan vows vengeance with a "I'm not through with that Koppy McFad yet!--\ Going to his own private stronghold, Stan muses, "He doesn't know I'm the YOUNGEST, most DANGEROUS villain in the world--THE RAT!--" Strewn about his lair, Stan has numerous comics of a publication straight from the files of Dr. Frederic Wertham--"ATROCITY COMICS."

Stan Powers 'the older kid' dons a rat costume, with razor sharp claws, no less, and waits for Supersnipe. And when the two meet--the suspense is terrific. In a darkened alley, "Something clicks in Super's Telepathic mind." (There is a sign reading 'Danger' in the thought balloon above Koppy's head.) And the text continues: "The next instant the Champion of evil and the champion of good face each other!" For once evil triumphs over good, not because of virtue but because of circumstances. After all, he was 'an older kid'. It is Roxy Adams who must rescue Supersnipe, who has undergone, at the hands of The Rat, the"stuff the pig torture." Koppy has been force-fed gallons of ice cream, which he had been taking to a school picnic, before villainy struck. "I'm comin' Supersnipe! I'll save you!" cries Roxy vaulting into the "Rat's Nest." "Burp," says a loggy Supersnipe. Many belches later, plus a ride through the streets of Yapburg in an out-of-control coaster wagon, Supersnipe delivers the rest of the ice cream to the picnic, emits a final "Burp,"; the 'older kid' is carted off to jail by the police; Roxy is a hero and Supersnipe is just plain sick.

Beneath the logo of the first inside page of the story appeared the names, tiny but there, of the men responsible for Supersnipe. You looked closely and beneath the "E" (the first one that is) in Supersnipe, there was inscribed the names Gruskin and Marcoux.

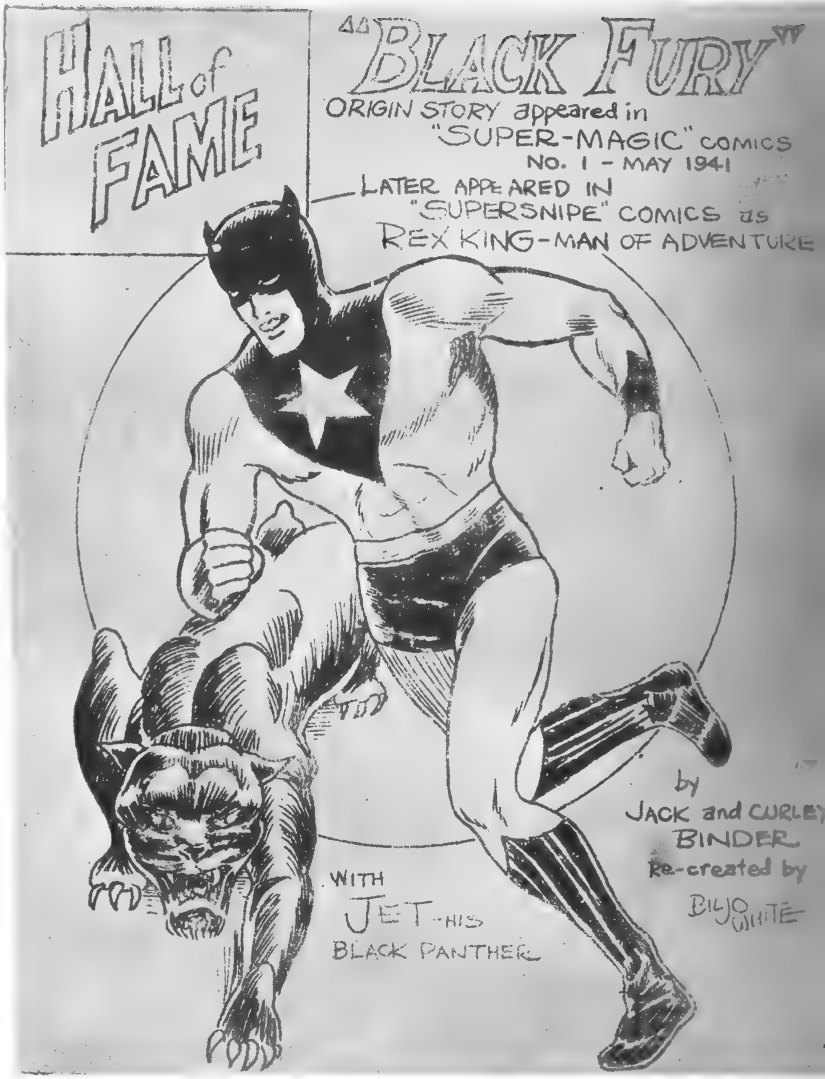
Editor Gruskin had an answer for would-be artists and writers of comic strips. He answered thusly the question--How many panels should a page average. "Some editors require 8 panels to every page, but the general rule is more elastic. In order that action not be limited, background not crowded, an artist must have space. If there is a great deal of action, with many characters, a panel might require a half page or even a whole page. You must weigh the value of the panel in your mind and give the action as much space as you think the artist needs to give it its full value. In a 25 page script, I like to balance it something like this; two-full page panels with lots of action, 3 or 4 two-panel pages, also with good action; about 15 or 16 five-and-six panel pages with average action, and possibly a couple of 8-panel pages, when there is little action, but much exposition, explaining or giving the story motivation. A carefull study of 3 or 4 issues of SUPERSNIPE, I think will bear this out."

Yes, this was the formula that Gruskin carried out and it kept Supersnipe on top until that sad day when...(and very few 'real' super heroes can boast of this) the staid New York Times told of the sad demise of two Street & Smith Publications--one being SUPERSNIPE.

What killed him off? It wasn't old age certainly. For Koppy, like Orphan Annie, or Little Annie Rooney or Superman, for that matter, never aged. No, I think it was a shadow. A shadow of impending manhood. When things were no longer wonderful and exciting. When things became routine and Yapburg was either a place to work 8 hours a day or leave for some far-off place where enchantment still dwelt. A shadow of the day when Koppy's own son might be donning a costume of blue and scarlet to slide down an evespout in quest of adventure, while Koppy the elder stood by looking on wistfully. A time when Herlock Dolmes might be just a 'regular' on the city police force, Wacky--a chemist in a fire clay company, and Roxy--hurtling verbal arrows at a P.T.A. meeting instead of real ones at imagined or real foes-even if they were only 'older kids.'

It was a shadow of things to come and Koppy out out. He had good sense to do so, but somehow, I miss him. That's why every Ground-Hog's Day I think, for a moment about Koppy McFad. I don't think he'll ever come back though--he's probably too busy making money. And the lodge cape he wears now is probably just that--a lodge cape and nothing more. But I hope he's happy. He made me and thousands of other young readers of the 40's happy

THE END


HALL of FAME
"BLACK FURY"
ORIGIN STORY appeared in
"SUPER-MAGIC" COMICS
NO. 1 - MAY 1941
LATER APPEARED IN
"SUPERSNIPE" COMICS as
REX KING-MAN OF ADVENTURE
by
JACK and CURLEY
BINDER
Re-created by
BILL WHITE
WITH
JET-HIS
BLACK PANTHER

No. 27
Star Spangled COMICS
Tom Comes
BIG FEATS
SUPERMAN
The NEWSBOY LEGION and GUARDIAN

POCKET SIZE COMICS

reprinted from
THE ROCKET'S BLAST -
COMICOLLECTOR No. 29

BY RAYMOND MILLER

Did you ever here of Pocket Size Comics? What were they? Well here is the story. They measured 7 inches high and 5 inches wide, contained 100 pages and sold for one thin dime; all this and in color too! They were billed as "The Biggest Comics Value in the World" and it's easy to see why. There were 3 titles published and a number of others that I feel sure never made it to the presses. These three were POCKET COMICS, SPITFIRE COMICS, and SPEED COMICS. The last was the original SPEED COMIC but for #15, Nov. 1941, it was cut down to pocket size. But with #17 itw was back to normal size. SPEED #15 contained Shock Gibson who was in all issues starting with #1, Also in #15 were Capt. Freedom, The Young Defenders, Biff Benon, Crash, Cork, and the Earth, Pat Parker-War Nurse (the first issue for her), Speed Taylor, and Ted Parrish the Man of a thousand faces.

The second title was SPITFIRE COMICS and the first issue was dated Aug. 1941. I don't know if there were more than two issues or not, but in my opinion, this was the weakest of the three, but I assure you there was nothing weak about the other two. SPITFIRE #1 had a beautiful cover featuring an airplane battle and yes, some of the planes were British Spitfires. 200 years before 1941, an English adventurer called "Black Douglas" was set adrift by pirates and soon he found himself on a deserted island. Dieing from thirst he dragged himself to a pool of water and too late noticed a strange gas and steam was coming from the pool and it put him to sleep. Two centuries later he awakens to find the world at war. Soon he discovers that he can breath out the same gas he had been inhaling for 200 years. He uses this power to knock out Nazi soldiers and then it happened...the Nazis rushed him and he blew his breath on a torch and a German yelled ,"He spit fire!" and the name stuck.

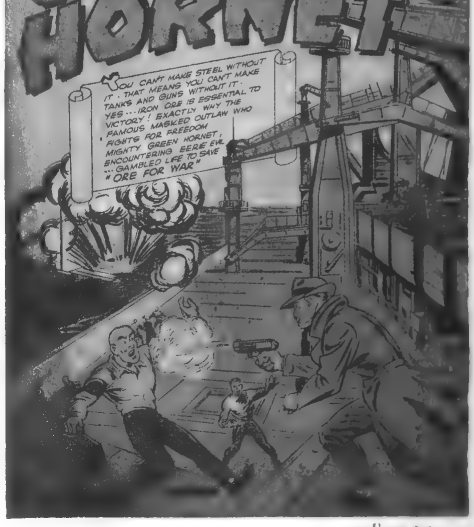
Also in #1 were The Clown, Buckskin Boys, Gary Morgan-foreign correspondent, The Magician from Bagdad Rurik the Sea King, and Fly-Man. The Fly-Man had a costume a lot like that of the old Atom and was the size of a fly. How did he get that way? Clip Foster, a boxer, had a father who was an inventor and he had just discovered a way to shrink humans and Clip was the first to try it out. Once he was shrunk some gangsters entered the lab and killed his father and knocked over some acid that burnt off Clip's hair and face. Unable to regain his normal size he decided to make a costume that would cover his head. Being small he chose the name Fly-Man and avenged his father's death and then swore to devote the rest of his life to fighting crime.

The third, and to me the best, was POCKET COMICS itself. Number 1 was dated August 1941 and ran at least four issues. Thisw is the comic where three of Harvey's best heroes got their start. For born in #1 was The Spirit of '76, The Zebra, and The Black Cat. The origin of The Spirit of '76 (which was reprinted later in GREEN HORNET #7) went like this: Cadet Gary Blakely was to young to serve his country so he dons the costume that his Great-Great-Grandfather had worn and took the name Spirit of '76 and not even his secret. These stories were written by Major Blakely.

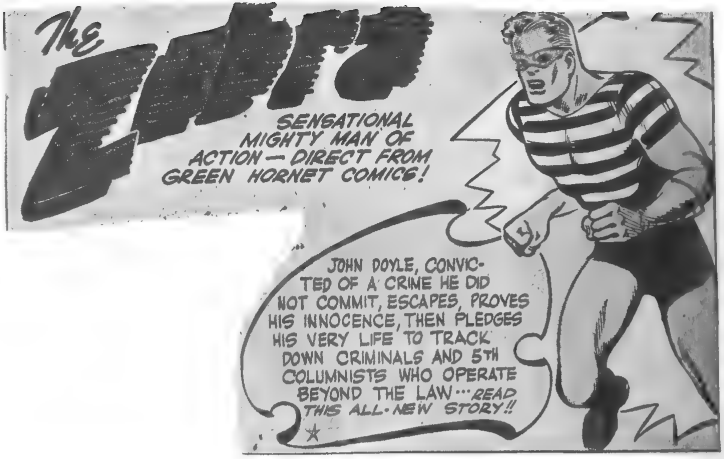
Another origin that was reprinted in GREEN HORNET #7 was that of the Zebra. In POCKET #1 John Doyle was convicted of murder and sentenced but later escape. All the clothes he had were his striped prison duds so this was the base for his costume. He added a cape,,belt, boots, and mask and took the name Zebra, for obvious reasons. His first case was to clear "John Doyle," which he did.

The Black Cat, as most everyone should know, was the Hollywood star and Sweetheart of America... Linda Turner. Miss Turner had gotten bored with the sophistiosated life she was living and decided that she needed a little action. Anyway, she had suspected that her movie director was really a Nazi spy and taking on a duel identity would not only give her thrills but prove that her director was a spy. Thus, the Black Cat came into being and proved to be the most famous costume hero to ever come from Harvey.

Also in POCKET COMICS was a character called Satan--mad dictator of the underworld. This was


GREEN HORNET
YOU CAN'T MAKE STEEL WITHOUT IT - THAT MEANS YOU CAN'T MAKE TANKS AND GUNS WITHOUT IT YES--IRON ORE IS ESSENTIAL TO VICTORY! EXACTLY WHY THE FAMOUS MASKED OUTLAW WHO FIGHTS FOR FREEDOM MIGHTY GREEN HORNET, ENCOUNTERING SEEMS EVIL SCHEMES TO SAVE GAMBLED IRON ORE FOR WAR"

GOOD GRIEF! G-GIANT BEES!
CAP THOSE BEES-- WATCH OUT!
THE BEE-KEEPER! HE'S SIGNALING THE BEES! WHY, YOU FIEND, I'LL--
NOW--DIE! --OF YOU! (Hmmm-m-m)
BUT AS THE STAR SPANGLED BRAKER CHARGED--
CAP! CAP! --E--M! THE B-BEES--
WHA--! THE BEES-- AFTER THE KIDS! --I GOT TO SAVE --BA--E BEE--!
--E--E--EE--! Hmmm
AND--
STEADY KIDS! --I'M GONNA TO BE BASY!
THE BATTLE THE GOOD UNMEN--PITCHFORK VERSUS FIRE EXTINGUISHER!
YYYEEOOW! THE OTHERS CAP! LOOK OUT!
HERE GOES NUMBER ONE!
C-CAP! LADY OUT!
I GOT ONE! BUT THE PITCHFORK STUCK IN HIM AND THE OTHERS ARE AFTER REVENGE!
HEH HEH! THIS'LL FIX THE FOOL!
8
A SECOND--IS SUCH A SHORT SPACE OF TIME, YET---
AHH! I MADE IT!
W-WE'RE SAVED--
WOW!
THANK YOU!
HIGH IN THE SKY, A DANGEROUS MANEUVER--AS SHOCK GIBSON REMOVES THE WARHEAD--
G-GAWSH--! LOOK AT HIM! AIN'T HE A-FEARED OF NOTHIN'? NOW WOT'S HE UP TO?
THERE. THAT TAKES OUT THE STING. HMM--NEVER SAW A TIN FISH LIKE THIS--IT NEEDS INVESTIGATING!
9


The Zebra
SENSATIONAL MIGHTY MAN OF ACTION — DIRECT FROM GREEN HORNET COMICS!
JOHN DOYLE, CONVICTED OF A CRIME HE DID NOT COMMIT, ESCAPES, PROVES HIS INNOCENCE, THEN PLEDGES HIS VERY LIFE TO TRACK DOWN CRIMINALS AND 5TH COLUMNISTS WHO OPERATE BEYOND THE LAW··· READ THIS ALL-NEW STORY!!

BLACK CAT
ONCE MORE BLACK CAT
AST AND FURIOUS ACTION, AS SHE TRIES TO SCALP 'HIM'S' LATEST SCHEME OF TERROR. THE INDIANS GALLOP WILDLY OFF THEIR RESERVATION, ONLY TO MEET BLACK CAT ON WARPATHS OF

written by Eando Binder and as for the character, there is no need to explain who Satan was...the devil...who else?

Another was the Red Blazer. A space ship landed on a lonely Wyoming prarie and an Earthman named Dr. Morgan and a Martian emerged from it but the alien died, due to the Earth's atmosphere Just as the Doctor is about through with burying him, a cowboy happens to come along and he helps him finish up. Then Dr. Morgan gave to cowhand something to drink and he passed out. When he later regained conciousness he found himself in the ship somewhere in space and he finds himself wearing a costume and feeling peculiar. He reads a note from Dr. Morgan telling him he has just passed heavenside-land of the Astro-Pyro rays and that he is now the perfect man. Later, back on Earth, he masters the Astro-Pyro rays and discovers he can turn on and off a flame that covers his body, at will, and calls himself The Red Blazer.

Others in POCKET COMICS were Spin Hawkins, The Phantom Spinx-a revived mummy called The Great Amron, who used his magic of ancient Egypt to fight the evils of the modern world, and last, British Agent 99.

While both POCKET and SPEED COMICS were published by Alfred Harvey and SPITFIRE by John F. Mason, they were still companion mags.

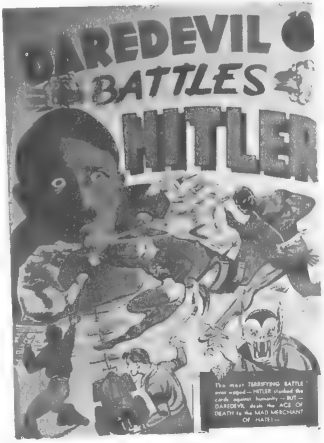
POCKET #1 featured the Spirit of '76 on the cover, while #4 had him and Black Cat, and #3 had a striking Black Cat cover. POCKET #1 also carried ads for these titles: PATRIOTIC POCKET COMICS, HISTORIC COMICS, DIGEST COMICS, ARMY POCKET COMICS, BLACK CAT COMICS, and SPIRIT OF '76 BATTLES SATAN. As I said before, I doubt that any were ever published, except Black Cat, and that was 5 years later in a regular size comic.

THE END

SPIRIT OF '76

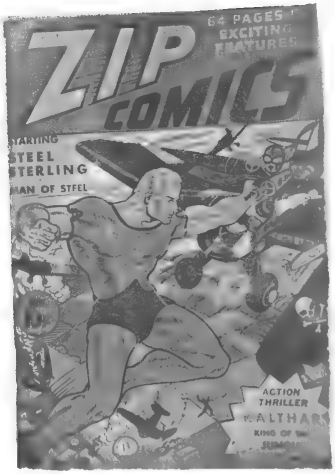
RICHY
THE AMAZING BOY
MYSTERY
COMICS
THE MAGIC-MAKING WONDER DOG
NO.16 CAPTAIN FLAG STARTS IN THIS ISSUE
SEPT.
10¢

GREEN LANTERN
10¢

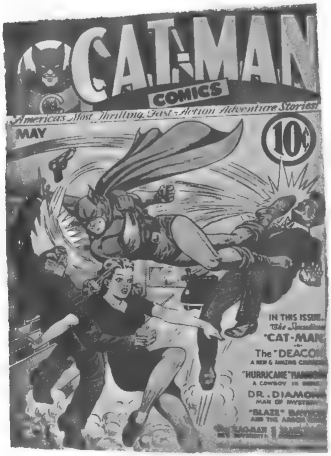

DAREDEVIL
BATTLES
HITLER

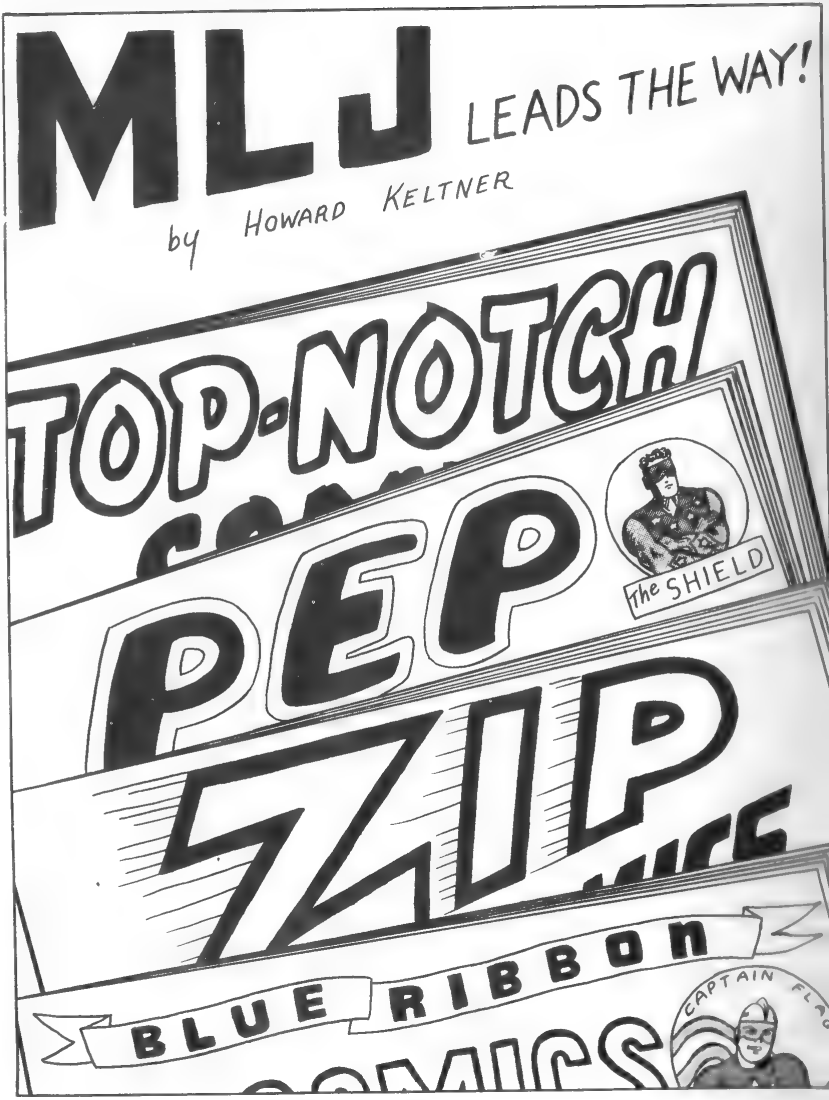
10¢
Comics
JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA
Featuring
THE FLASH– THE SPECTRE – DR. FATE –
THE GREEN LANTERN – THE HAWKMAN –
THE HOUR-MAN – THE SANDMAN –
THE ATOM, AND JOHNNY THUNDER
in the first complete book-length adventures of the Justice Society of America

Leading
COMICS
10¢


64 PAGES
EXCITING
FEATURES
ZIP
COMICS
ACTION
THRILLER

All-Flash
QUARTERLY
SUMMER
NO 1
ISSUE
A COMPLETE 64 PAGE ISSUE
CONTAINING ALL NEW, NEVER-
BEFORE-PUBLISHED EPISODES
OF The Flash
-FASTEST MAN ALIVE!


CAT-MAN
COMICS
MAY
10¢
IN THIS ISSUE
"CAT-MAN"
The "DEACON"
"HURRICANE"
DR. DIAMOND
MAN OF MYSTERY
"BLAZE"


MLJ LEADS THE WAY!
by HOWARD KELTNER
TOP-NOTCH
PEP
the SHIELD
ZIP
BLUE RIBBON
CAPTAIN

In 1938, with the world on the brink of war, Superman made his appearance in the first issue of ACTION COMICS (June, 1938, and a new fad was born. The Batman followed in the May, 1939 issue of DETECTIVE COMICS (number 27), and the costumed hero was on his way. By 1940, there were at least a dozen companies in competition with each other in the publication of comic books devoted to the costumed hero. By the time America entered the war, over 200 costumed heroes had seen the light of day. Most of these heroes battled crime and subversion throughout the war years, but with the coming of peace, there came a thinning of the ranks, as other fads began to dominate the comic books: humor, western, romance, horror, science fiction, fantasy, and war stories, just to name a few. Today, after more than a decade in near-oblivion, the costumed hero is again becoming the king pin of the comic books. This fad, like the original movement, began at DC, has spread to many other publishing houses: to name a few; Atlas, Gold Key, Harvey, and Stadium.

The last mentioned, Stadium Publishing Company, is an outgrowth of MLJ Magazines one of the first and most successful of DC's competitors, In late 1939 and early 1940 MLJ issued a new comic book every month for four consecutive months. One of them, PEP COMICS, is still being published today. Another, TOP-NOTCH COMICS, changed its title to TOP-NOTCH LAUGH COMICS with issue number 28, later dropped the words "TOP-NOTCH" and is today being published as LAUGH COMICS. The other two, ZIP COMICS and BLUE RIBBON COMICS, lasted 47 and 22 issues, respectively. It was MLJ's intention to publish these books on a monthly schedule, but it was the Spring of 1941 before this ambition was achieved. During the first year each of the titles skipped a month here and there. Indeed, when Zip COMICS #1 appeared for February, 1940, BLUE RIBBON number 4 was scheduled to go on sale; but it was June before the latter finally made it, and then with an almost entirely new lineup of characters. Thus, when the periodicals finally assumed an uninterrupted monthly schedule in early 1941, the oldest title had the lowest number.

Like most publishers of that day, MLJ had its own stable of writers and artists, though a few of the illustrators gained recognition elsewhere. Probably the best known among its artists were Irving Novick, Charles Biro, Mort Meskin, Jack Binder, Irwin Hasen, E.I. Wexler, Al Camy, Paul Reinman, Jack Cole, Bob Wood, and Sam Cooper. The names of Harry Shorten (later chief editor) and Joe Blair appeared more often as writers. I strongly suspect that Joe Blair was a fictitious name, used by more than one writer, The variety of strips attributed to this name seem to have been too widespread to be the product of one man. Besides, the name sounds phony! But, to return to the artists, whose work, after all, is more easily identifiable, I cannot but feel that only two of them, Camy and Novick, did their best work for MLJ. Camy left MLJ and came up with some pretty good stuff for Standard, and one or two other publishers. His drawings of The Black Hood, The Wizard, and Black Jack,are among the best MLJ published. Probably the very best, though, so was Novick's The Shield in 1940 and 1941. But Paul Reinman's drawings of Inferno were good, but the rest of his stuff was mediocre. Sam Cooper was another artist of opposite extremes; his illustrations of Mr. Justice were alternately terrific and sloppy. He was at his peak during 1941, which, in my opinion, was the year for the super-heroes. Mort Meskin is a name perhaps more familiar to fans of today. He regularly turns up in the DC magazines, ranking right up there with the best of the ink-splashers. His style, however, has not changed too much from the days when he was doing Ty-gor, Son of Tiger, Doc Strong, and a few others. About the only difference is a vast improvement in the important item of background. Meskin's best work for MLJ was on The Scarlet Avenger, a pretty good character, incidently. Many other artists were featured in the pages of MLJ publications, too many to elaborate on here, but a few deserve a mention in passing. The better ones were Lin Streeter, Frank Volp, E.M. Ashe, Ed Smalle, Bob Montana, Harry Sahle, and Carl Hubbell.

Like most of the other publishers, MLJ had its group of major characters, i.e. the ones given prominence over the others, and then it also had its minor ones; and, also like the other publishers, some of the minor or supporting characters were better than some of the stars. It should be pointed out here that I am restricting this observation to the costumed characters, and that the opinions expressed are of necessity my own. I think at this point a breakdown of all MLJ's major costumed heroes would be more appropiate and less confusing than skipping back and forth. So here they are individually, in the order of their origin, from the earliest to the latest.

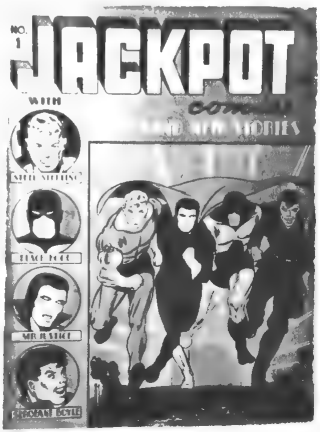
1. The Wizard. The Man with the Super-Brain was MLJ's first costumed character, making his debut in TOP-NOTCH COMICS number 1, dated December, 1939. (Actually, BLUE RIBBON COMICS first appeared one month earlier, but contained no super-hero until issue number 9.) The Wizzard must be classified as a super-hero despite the fact that he did not assume his more-familiar costume until issue number 7. He first appeared in magician-like garb, complete with tuxedo, high hat, cape, and mask. However, this outfit was not too appealing, and no doubt the change was made

CAPT. FLAG
STEEL STERLING
MR. JUSTICE
Cooper '41
BIRO '41

in order to boost the strip's popularity. The addition of Roy, the Super-Boy, in TOP-NOTCH number 11 also added to the strip's popularity. In the earlier issues The Wizard tangled with international spies with an occasional assist from The Shield. Later he and Roy confined their activities for the most part to breaking up domestic crime rings.

2. The Shield. The first of MLJ's really super heroes was The Shield, G-Man Extraordinary. He was the star of PEP COMICS from its very first issue (January, 1940) until the Archie-type characters finally crowed him out many years later. He, along with The Black Hood, lasted longer than any of MLJ's costumed characters. Blessed with a striking red, white, and blue costume and one of the best illustrators in the business in Irving Novick, The Shield was destined for stardom from the very outset. Indeed, PEP COMICS was one of America's best selling comic magazines for a long time. But when the decline came, it came fast, and The Shield was ruined when in a special story in PEP number 30, his super powers were taken from him. He was never the same after that. Let it be said to MLJ's credit, however, that it did give The Shield a good initial build-up. Realizing the tremendous popularity of this hero, they quickly proceeded to feature him, along with the new and rejuvenated Wizard, in a quarterly magazine; thus in the Summer of 1940 was born SHIELD-WIZARD. Though the comic also featured The Wizard, everyone knew that The Shield was the real star, the prime reason the magazine sold copies. When MLJ revamped TOP-NOTCH COMICS in mid-1942, The Wizard was dropped; BUT Later, when the 'funny' characters took over PEP COMICS, The Shield remained, vastly degenerated though he was. (EDITOR'S NOTE: A new version of The Shield debuted in 1959, but lasted in his own magazine through only two issues. Another version, now appears occasionally in THE FLY, and MIGHTY COMICS.)

3. Steel Sterling. Never one of my particular favorites, Steel Sterling was nevertheless one of MLJ's more popular characters. Born in ZIP COMICS number 1 (February, 1940), he appeared on the cover of every one of that magazine's 47 issues, maintaining a position of prominence until the very end, despite the addition of two other outstanding characters in later issues. (EDITOR'S NOTE: It is rumored that Steel Sterling was forced into an early grave by DC as a Superman-imitator. Can anyone confirm this rumor?) His red and blue costume was simplicity personified, yet somehow appealing. Steel was never blessed with the best of artwork at anytime during his career. His original artist, Charles Biro, did some reasonably good work during 1941, but later he began to concentrate his efforts more on Daredevil for another publisher. Later, in late 1942, Biro left MLJ for good, and for the next few years he really turned out some fine Daredevil stories. After Biro's departure, Irving Novick took over the art end of the Steel Sterling strip, but by this time Irv had passed his peak and only for a few issues did he come up with any really good work on the Man of Steel. Yet, despite this apparent handicap of generally mediocre artwork, Steel Sterling prospered, and I suspect that his popularity stemmed



mainly from good characterization and better-than-average story plots. Whatever the reason, when the new quarterly magazine JACKPOT COMICS was introduced in the Spring of 1941, Steel Sterling was the headline feature, ranking first in the magazine, even ahead of the Black Hood. He maintained that position for as long as the magazine lasted. He outlasted all the other costumed heroes in ZIP COMICS, being the only one left when that magazine folded in 1945.

4. The Black Hood. Already riding high with the new Wizard, TOP-NOTCH COMICS became a real leader with the addition of The Man of Mystery in issue number 9 (Oct., 1940). (EDITOR'S NOTE: About one year after his appearence in comics, The Black Hood was featured in a pulp magazine entitled BLACK HOOD DETECTIVE MAGAZINE. This was a rather unique achievement for a hero born of the comic book.) When this terrific new character was introduced, the result was very little short of sensation al/ MLJ was now approaching its very highest calibre of production. The Black Hood was the crowning masterpiece. His popularity was instantaneous and overwhelming, yet even so it was no accident. Several things attested to the success of this new hero: superb artwork on the part of Al Camy, story plots far above the standard of the day, and the advent in the very first story of one of the most cunning and diabolical villains in comic book annals, the Skull. Seven times the Dark Knight of Justice came to grips with this insidious fiend, and each story was a corker. But let it be said to MLJ's credit that they did not overdo a good thing, and in TOP-Notch number 19, the Skull received his deserved reward--death in the electric chair. The Black Hood's stories usually bordered a bit on the macabre side, and he battled more of the "weird" type antagonists than any of the other MLJ heroes, except Mr. Justice. Like Steel Sterling, the Man of Darkness was given featured billing in the new quarterly JACKPOT COMICS, ranking right behind sterling in every issue. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Today, The Black Hood, in essentially his original form, has been revived for occasional guest appearences in THE FLY and MIGHTY COMICS.)

5. Mr. Justice. No doubt elated by the success of The Black Hood, MLJ decided to go one step further along the line, and when they introduced Mr. Justice in the February, 1941 issue of BLUE RIBBON COMICS (number 9), they M really went off the deep end. For in the Royal Wraith they now had the ultimate in the weird and fantastic, and they played it to the hilt. Mr. Justice was a spirit, representing, of course, the good element in the world as opposed to every embodiment of evil. In every issue of BLUE RIBBON COMICS and also JACKPOT COMICS he waged a continual war against vampires, werewolves, evil spirits, and demons of all kinds, even to the point of descending to the very depths of Hades at times to do battle with Satan himself. Mr. Justice never attained the intense popularity of The M BlacK Hood, Steel Sterling, and The Shield, but he did have a devoted following during his brief career. (He happened to be my favorite character when I was a young boy.) Naturally, his stories could never pass the Comics Code Authority today, but twenty years ago he was something different and unique. His artist, Sam Cooper, had a flair for the supernatural, and when he took his time he was one of the best MLJ had. I don't know if it was because of the war or poor circulation and low sales, but BLUE RIBBON COMICS folded after the 22nd issue, dated March, 1942, leaving Mr. Justice to quarterly appearences in JACKPOT COMICS, where he soon faded into insignificance, both story-wise and in art.

6. The Hangman. By now it had become M very evident that what the young comic fan wanted was costumed characters and more of the same, so the editors at MLJ were busy creating one top-flight star after another, yet always coming up with something new and different each time. PEP COMICS had been including a minor costumed character with somewhat super powers called The Comet. But The Comet was never particularly popular and it was decided to drop him in favor of a new and better mystery man. Yet it was sheer genius on someone's part to inject a very human element into the whole scheme, and as a result something that had never happened before transpired in the July, 1941 issue (number 17). The Comet was allowed to be killed, and his place was taken by his brother, who vowed a personal vengeance upon all criminals and lawbreakers. And so was born The Hangman, MLJ's newest and one of its best creations from the popularity standpoint.

HANGMAN
NOVICK
'41
SHIELD

This origin story was written by Cliff Campbell, while many of the later stories were written by Bill Woolfolk. It undoubtedly was the characterization and better-than-average stories that put the Hangman over, because the artwork was, in my opinion, atrocious, the worst of any of MLJ's costumed heroes. (EDITOR'S NOTE: The Hangman strips were handled by several artists: first, George Storm, and later Lucey and King.) Be that as it may, The Hangman proved a big success, and in the Winter of that same year, 1941, MLJ brought out a quarterly magazine entitled SPECIAL COMICS, which featured this new character exclusively, and also included special stories of the Boy Buddies, who were none other than Roy, the Super Boy, and Dusty, the Boy Detective, youthful companions of The Wizard and The Shield, respectively, With the second issue, the title was changed to THE HANGMAN COMICS, and it lasted about six or seven issues. Though The Hangman was never one of my particular favorites, I did like his blue and green costume, and I recognize the fact that he was a major factor in the success of the MLJ Magazines, as long as this success lasted. It is worthy of note, however, that he was dropped from the pages of PEP COMICS long before the Shield.

7. Captain Flag. Not too much can be said of this particular character, due to the fact that his stay was so short) only seven months). He was, however, prominently featured while he was around, and I really believe that he was just coming into his own when he was snuffed out of existence. Captain Flag was born in the September, 1941 issue of BLUE RIBBON COMICS (number 16), and, like The Black Hood, encountered a major foe in his very first adventure, namely, The Black Hand. Four of his seven episodes were struggles with this most worth antagonist, whom he finally vanquished for keeps in his very last story (issue number 22). Though not a particularly super-hero, Captain Flag had a superior-type origin, very reasonably conceived and worked out, and his costume was a striking combination of red, white, blue, and purple. At first he was accompanied by his American Eagle, Yank, who played a major role in the origin story, but who did not appear in the later stories

8. Black Jack. The year 1941 had been a good one, indeed, with all the new stars doing so well. Each of MLJ's four monthly magazines now contained two costumed characters, with the exception of ZIP COMICS, where STeel Sterling was still holding out alone. This situation was soon remedied, when in November (issue number 20) Black Jack joined the ranks. It was advertised elsewhere that with the addition of Black Jack to a magazine which already contained Steel Sterling, the result that ZIP COMICS had now become the best comic book in the world! Of course this was hardly true, but for about a year or so Black Jack did add measurably to the calibre of ZIP COMICS. His stories were above par, and the artwork was by top-notcher Al Camy, who also did The Black Hood. Black Jack's foes were unique in that, like himself, they represented some prominent card of aspect of playing cards, and each was a wily and extremely inheresting opponent. Some of the best and most worthy were The Black Seven, Poker Face, The Joker, and The King of Diamonds. The Black Seven and Poker Face each required moreW than one issue in which to be vanquished. It seems that Black Jack was created fairly close to the beginning of the end, as far as the success of the MLJ costumed characters were concerned, and when in a few months the gradual change-over to the "comic" type character began, he was first subjected to very bad artwork by the likes od "Red" Holmdale and Sam Cooper, and then he was dropped completely.

9. The Web. The last of MLJ's attempts at really good costumed heroes, The Web was one of the best for a whilw. But by the time of his initial appearence (ZIP COMICS number 27, July, 1942) one magazine (BLUE RIBBON COMICS) had already folded, and evidences of worse things to come could be noted by the careful observer. In fact, it had been previously advertised that The Web was to begin in the July issue of TOP-NOTCH COMICS. But at the last minute something happened: TOP-NOTCH COMICS became TOP-NOTCH LAUGHW COMICS, featuring Pokey Oakey, The Applejacks, Senor Banana, and such like, and The Web made his debut in in ZIP COMICS instead. Nevertheless

THE WEB
BLACK HOOD
Camy '41

as has been previously stated, for a few issues The Web was a very good character with good stories and excellent artwork. (I am sorry to say that I don't know the name the the artist.) However, as has also been pointed out earlier, the calibre of Irving Novick's art had declined to the point that it was difficult to recognize at all. So then when he took over The Web, that was all. I think that probably the most outstanding thing about The Web was his green and yellow costume. Patterned after Daredevil, I admit, but it was still one of the most colorful of any of MLJ's heroes.

There you have them, a star-studded lineup of nine of the most important costumed adventurers of the early and middle forties, a time when anything could happen, and usually did. These were the leading features of one of the major publishers of the time, and their influence on the comics world as a whole was most certainly felt. Of course there were minor supporting characters, some of which given the opportunity could have been equally effective. The best of these were The Firefly, Inferno, The Fox, The Scarlet Avenger, Mr. Satan, Bob Phantom, The Comet, and The Fireball.

THE END

MASQUERADER

ALL PHOTO OFFSET
WRAP AROUND BINDING

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: "THE MASQUERADER SPEAKS" BY KIKE VOSBURG & ART BY RONN FOSS. "DYNAMIC KUNERT, MASTER ARTIST" BY S. RUSSELL. "THE RAVEN" BY GLEN JOHNSON & ART BY ALAN WEISS. "BATMAN'S ROGUES GALLERY" BY L.L. SIMPSON & ART BY DICK MEMORICH. "THE NEW TREND" BY ED LAHMANN. "WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO DISNEY'S COMICS?" BY DICK WEST & ART BY GRASS GREEN. "FALL OF INFAMY" ART BY DICK MEMORICH. "JACK FIRST, AN ARTIST WITH IMPACT" BY LEN WEIN. "RETURN OF THE NEBULAE BY FOSS & VOSBURG. "A HISTORY OF ACE PUBLICATIONS" BY MILLER & GREEN. ALL COPIES MAILED FLAT IN A HEAVY ENVELOPE. ORDER FROM THE S.P.C.A.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Like original artwork. Here are a couple of pieces I had on file which I think everyone will agree, have stayed in my files too long. The Capt America drawing is by a fine new artist, from England I believe, but his name escapes me. He did initial it though & I'm sure he will recognize it. The Green Hornet drawing is by John Fantucchio, who needs absolutely no introduction.

An Interview With HARVEY KURTZMAN

Text and interview by Alan Hewetson · Produced for Voice of Comicdom by Bill Spicer

Introduction -

This little piece actually needs no introduction. It seems to me that any red - blooded, modern, dyed-in-the-wool fan of comic art who has never studied Harvey Kurtzman's work probably never will. Harvey is one of those rare individuals who seems to have millions of fans and yet when his name is brought up in conversation, no one seems to know exactly who he is. How many times have I heard the question, "Kurtzman, Kurtzman, who is this Kurtzman fellow?"

We recently had the opportunity of visiting Mr. Kurtzman at his Mt. Vernon, New York, home. It was a most enjoyable and memorable experience; and, wanting to share it with you, we take pleasure in presenting a candid conversation-interview with the satirical wizard. The article is preceded by a short biography noting his accomplishments to date.

Biography -

The year is 1965 and Harvey Kurtzman, imperial wizard of parody, is showing signs of weathering: five foot eight and balding, Harvey is still top of the heap. The master satirist contributes regularly to PLAYBOY magazine in the form of "Little Annie Fanny"--a strip which seems to be poking fun at anything and everything; he is the editor of the popular humor magazine, HELP!, and he is the author of many books, the most recent of which is a parody of crossword puzzles called FUN & GAMES.

But the story of Kurtzman started many years ago--October 3, 1924, to be exact. At the age of nine he revealed his talent as he drew a cartoon strip, IKEY AND MIKEY, on the sidewalks of New York. A few years later, in 1936, his first published cartoon appeared in the New York Times. Those were the humble beginnings of the man who was to later create the outrageous MAD magazine, the wildest collection of oddities ever to be published by anyone. August of 1952 his brainchild appeared for public appraisal--and it was an almost immediate success. Preparation for his editorship came in the form of other EC publications such as TWO FISTED TALES and FRONTLINE COMBAT. It might be noteworthy that Jerry DePaolo, now assistant editor of MAD, commented that Harvey at the time was working about 25 hours a day for EC and William Gaines. Twenty-nine successful issues of MAD followed before disagreements with the publisher, William Gaines, caused him to leave the magazine.

TRUMP, which, quality-wise, was perhaps Harvey's biggest pride and joy, made its appearance in 1956 with PLAYBOY magnate Hugh Hefner as the publisher. 2 issues of this extravaganza was all Hefner's pocketbook could stand, and its demise came quickly and quietly.

HUMBUG graced the news-stands for 12 successful issues, produced with contributors Jack Davis, Will Elder, Arnold Roth, Al Jaffee, and Harry Chester.

Fans in 1958 had the opportunity of seeing Kurtzman in such magazines as FAGEANT and ESQUIRE, as well as a collection of Kurtzman satires in a little pocket anthology published by Ballantine entitled HARVEY KURTZMAN'S JUNGLE BOOK.

HELP! arrived on the scene in 1960 but was slow to catch on; in fact, it was always in danger of folding. But, sustained by the immediate success of "Little Annie Fanny" in PLAYBOY, Harvey kept plodding away and the issues are now pouring forth strongly and steadily.

He now lives in a suburb of New York--Mount Vernon--with his wife and three children.

Interview-

HEWETSON: Perhaps the most appropriate starter-question would be to ask how you got started in the field of cartooning. What were some of your early jobs in the field?

KURTZMAN: Well, I started as most cartoonists do start, in high school. I did some work for the newspaper, then, while it didn't pay off financially, it gave me the experience I needed to try submitting a few cartoons to magazines and newspapers. But my first ideas on my future were formed in art school. At that time comic books were as easy a field as any to break into and I became quite interested as a result.

HEWETSON: Did you start with EC Publications or did your work see publication elsewhere first?

KURTZMAN: No, I started as a cartoonist's helper long before I went to EC. This was before the second world war and I didn't apply to EC until it was well over.

HEWETSON: How did you actually get started with the Gaines publications?

KURTZMAN: I brought around a folio of cartoons to quite a few different publishers and EC was one of them. It was just an accident, I guess, that it happened to be them that replied first, and so I joined up with them.

HEWETSON: What do you think would be your favorite piece of published work?

KURTZMAN: Well, I think "Little Annie Fanny" is the combination of a number of techniques I've been working on for a long time. "Goodman Beaver" is another favorite of mine.

HEWETSON: Who are your favorite cartoonists?

KURTZMAN: Probably the same as yours, Al--you know my likes and dislikes as many be seen in the pages of HELP! I'd say Jack Davis and Will Elder are the tops in my field, along with most of the other fellows I've worked with, of course. But on the syndicated level I think Kelly and Schulz are present-day comic chieftans. I also like Fischetti and Dedini.

HEWETSON: You mention Schulz; I was talking with him the other evening by telephone and he mentioned Walt Kelly as being HIS favorite.

KURTZMAN: Well, even though the men are both doing different types of work, I still think Schulz is the leader.

HEWETSON: What magazines would you most like to work for?

KURTZMAN: I think that I already have reached the culmination of my desires there--namely, ESQUIRE and PLAYBOY. I've never been intrigued by working for magazines; I would much rather go out and create one. I think that I have proved, through the years, with the magazines with my personal point of view, my idealistic way of looking at things. Of course, every cartoonist has his desire, hidden or not, to work for the big name, successful magazines like THE NEW YORKER or LOOK. To get a cartoon in THE NEW YORKER today would not nearly be so much a thrill as it would have been a few years ago. The reason? Well, I think that now that I know the editors, the writers and the artists, it doesn't retain the same charm as it used to have.

HEWETSON: What advice would you give to beginning cartoonists?

KURTZMAN: On cartooning generally I think if you're going to be a big success you will have to spend hours and hours practicing. The most important thing to a beginner is to keep plodding away at it--trying at the same time to bring out a style of your own. But, to plug on and on--practice, I think, is the magic watchword. Speaking from experience, I know that there's no shortcut to success. This is the only way to be competitive. And then again, you must have God-given talent. Keep your hands busy at all times. I know that when I started I was working in a printshop where I had the occasional chance to draw a cartoon, but I was always at a brush even though I was just drawing food posters.

HEWETSON: For my final question I think I would be most interested in hearing your personal report on your reasons--

KURTZMAN: For leaving MAD, right?

HEWETSON: Ha ha, how did you ever guess?

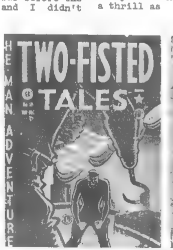
KURTZMAN: Well, it's not that long or involved an account, actually. I had thought of leaving MAD much earlier, but when Bill Gaines brought up the proposition of changing the format from a pulp comic book to a slick-cover magazine, I decided to stay on. But later on I felt that, because of disagreements with the publisher, and because I simply felt that I had not as much editorial control as I needed or wanted, I left! It's as simple as that. There was a lot of things I wanted to do and couldn't in MAD.

HEWETSON: Well, you had great success in MAD, but you certainly did accomplish a lot of new and different ideas after you did leave the magazine, for which I am sure all your fans are grateful. By the way, do you still read MAD?

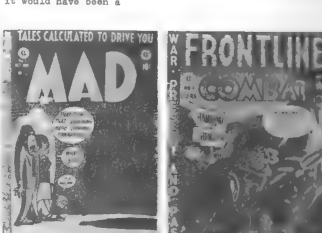
KURTZMAN: Sometimes!

--Alan Hewetson
August 12, 1965

Harvey Kurtzman at work inspecting a page of original art for his PLAYBOY strip, "Little Annie Fanny." Harvey uses two of his favorite comics artists for the series, Will Elder and Jack Davis. Others who have helped on the art include Russ Heath, Frank Frazetta, Al Jaffee & Kurtzman himself. Photo by Alan Hewetson.



Three of Kurtzman's early covers for EC: TWO-FISTED TALES #18 (#1, 1950) MAD #1 (1952), and FRONTLINE COMBAT #1 (1950). Kurtzman's bold, straightforward style lent itself equally well to both the humor and realistic approach in comic book illustration.



Cover photographs by Bob Foster.

Comics Collector

By Harold Scarlett

Gene R. Arnold is a pleasant 29-year-old college graduate with a good job, a nice home, a gracious wife—and a collection of 1,500 comic books.

He reads and re-reads them with the zest of a Sanskrit scholar. His wife can read along with him if she likes. But he turns the pages. He turns the pages.

"SHAZAM!" as Captain Marvel might say.

Is this what really goes on in the Arnolds' snug home at 2234 South Blvd? Yes saree, it is, just as sure as Superman came from the dying planet Krypton.

ARNOLD IS ONE of about two dozen Houstonians who have taken up about the hottest new hobby in the country. They collect rare, early-edition comic books.

Are they serious? Well, a Number 1 issue of Action Comics which introduced Superman in June, 1938, now goes for $100. Arnold has one of these, carefully kept in a glassine envelope. He's serious.

"The reason I collect them is just the nostalgia it brings back of my boyhood days," Arnold said. "By reading them, you can relive your childhood over and over."

In Arnold's case, the nostalgia is blighted by a spot of nausea.

HE STILL GETS a little sick when he thinks of the day in the 1940s when his mother made him get rid of his hundreds of comic books. She told him there was no longer room in the house for the comics and the family, too.

"I figured it up not long ago," Arnold said, "and I threw away at least $20,000 worth of comics at current market values. I remind my mother of that all the time."

Arnold figures the 1,500 comics he now has are worth about $2,000. One fellow in Chicago, he said, has a collection valued at $40,000.

He started collecting a year and a half ago with 10 or 15 comic books, including some 1942 issues of Captain Marvel, which he managed to hide from his mother's wrath and keep through the years.

The comics cult first started about five years ago, he said, but only in the past couple of years has it really spread across the country.

LIKE COIN AND stamp collectors, the comics fans now have their own network of dealers and their own publications for buying, selling and swapping comics.

There is a journal for Batman fans called Batmania. Another one is Alter Ego. Arnold gets one, published in Miami, called Rocket's Blast & The Comicollector.

On one recent cover, Comicollector ran a drawing of The Incredible Hulk, a grisly hero of present-day comics about whom Arnold knows little.

"Funny thing," he said, "I don't read current comic books."

Comicollector runs essays and editorials, letters to the editor, and long lists of comics wanted, up for sale or swapping. The prices range from 50 cents up to a top of about $100.

BESIDES HIS FIRST issue of Action Comics, Arnold has the February, 1940, edition of Whiz Comics, in which Captain Marvel made his debut. It is also valued at about $100.

He believes there are not more than three copies of this Whiz Comics still left in the country.

His oldest comic book is a Famous Funnies for 1935, with Joe Palooka and Jane Arden and her cut-out dresses. Strangely, it is not much in demand and is worth only about $25.

"The big demand is for first issues of the super heroes—Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel, Hawkman," Arnold said.

FAMOUS FUNNIES came out in 1933, the first comic book to appear for public sale on newsstands. Some newspapers and a soap manufacturer had put out comic booklets earlier.

Arnold feels the comic book code, adopted in 1954, took something out of the comic books. The code was adopted to cleanse the comics of excess gore, crime and sex.

"I like the earlier comics because they had much more action, they had a lot more pages, and they had better artists, I think," he said. "It seems like a lot of imagination has gone out of the stories."

Under the code, it does seem unlikely that anyone will ever match some of the arch enemies of the now-retired Captain Marvel. These included Sivana, World's Wickedest Scientist; Sivana Jr, World's Wickedest Boy, and Slinky Printwhistle, World's Wickedest Criminal.

SURROUNDED BY HIS 1,500 COMIC BOOKS, GENE ARNOLD THINKS NOSTALGICALLY OF HIS CHILDHOOD Arch Villains Like Slinky Printwhistle, World's Wickedest Criminal, Now Survive Only In Collectors' Stacks
Post Photo by Evan Peden

ARNOLD STUDIES HIS comics with a critical eye on the art work.

He drew cartoons for his high school newspaper and started at the University of Houston as an art major. But because his teachers did not share his fascination with cartooning, he switched to radio and television courses. He is now a newsman and sports director for Radio Station KODA.

Arnold's favorite comics for rampant imagination are Shock SuspenStories—Jolting Tales of Tension and its companion Crime SuspenStories.

That comic book stable fought the 1954 code with flag-waving editorials that warned with more heat than grammar: "The group most anxious to destroy comics are the Communists."

Since he was a boy, Arnold has felt a close identity with one bumbling comic book hero: Supersnipe — The Boy With the Most Comic Books in America.

Supersnipe tried to emulate his comic-book heroes, but he was always tripping over his Superman cape.

ARNOLD, LIKE OTHER collectors, prowls second-hand magazine shops looking for rare issues. Nowadays, he runs into more and more people doing the same thing.

At least, he figures, the growing number of collectors should increase prices and protect his investment.

Most of the collectors are men in their 20s or 30s who grew up along with the comic book industry. Nationally, there are at least 1,200 of them. That is the membership in a year-old Academy of Comic-Book Fans and Collectors, which was formed by a 31-year-old professor at a Detroit university.

Arnold keeps his growing collection in a linen chest in the bedroom. His wife is still looking for a new place to put the linen. When he is reading the old comics in bed, Arnold humors his wife by spreading a newspaper beneath them.

"I think there are little bugs in them," she said, shivering.

The pulp-paper comic books were never made to be heirlooms, and Arnold handles his tenderly. But even as a boy, he recalled, he always turned the pages carefully and kept the books in neat stacks. He wouldn't let other kids touch them.

"They must have thought you were a nut," his wife said, kidding him.

Sitting on the floor, surrounded by his neat stacks of boyhood nostalgia, Arnold smiled back serenely at his wife.

A Comeback (Sock!) For Comic Books (Pop!)

But the old superheroes are gone, replaced by a new breed of bogeymen created for—and bought by—adults

By Roger Ebert

MISS P. A. (Sam) La Chapelle is a comicologist. "A *comicologist*? "Sure, a comicologist. Why not?" asks Sam, an attractive blond who can quote you Batman's genesis quicker than most people can name his television sponsor. "To be honest, I got into it as a business, but it's a fun business. And, let's face it, I *like* comic books."

So do lots of other people, who in their everyday identities are mild-mannered businessmen, college students, bus drivers and (naturally) reporters. Once inside the Acme Book Store at 414 N. Clark, however, they turn into vicarious Spidermen, fearlessly scaling the heights of inflated comic book prices to capture items for their collections.

Like several other used book and magazine shops on N. Clark, Acme is a speciality house, catering to collectors rather than the general reading public. Veteran bookseller Noel Roy, the proprietor, considers hobbyists his mainstay, and the shelves are classified according to subject: the circus, railroads,

Continued on Page 22

FROM original Batmans to imitation Cat-Mans, old comics are prized by collectors. Surveying part of their domain are "Sam" La Chapelle, comics expert, and Noel Roy, proprietor of the Acme Book Store, 414 N. Clark St.

COLLECTOR'S items, these are issues 6 through 10 of the original "Batman." Dating from 1941, they bring at least $30 apiece in mint condition, so it's no wonder that even Batman is a "Batman" reader.

THESE six comics cost 60 cents new, but used they're worth $165. Shown are "Flash" No. 43 (July 1943, worth $10); "Detective" No. 45 (November 1940, a vintage Batman appearance, $25); "Adventure" No. 73 (April 1942, $22.50); "All-Star Comics" (Dec.-Jan. 1943, featuring the original DC stable of superheroes, $25); "Human Torch" (Summer 1942, with guest star Sub-Mariner, $40); and a rare "Superman" No. 4 (Spring 1940, $42.50). Prices are for mint condition issues, naturally.

photography, Chicago lore, occult, flying saucers, Americana, Big Little Books, movie posters, Edgar Rice Burroughs, monsters—and, of course, the comics.

"Comic books have reached some sort of high point today," said Miss La Chapelle, Acme's resident comicologist and Roy's partner in the business. "There are two things happening at once. The collector's market is growing, and at the same time people are reading new comic books who wouldn't have been caught dead with a comic five years ago." She attributed this renaissance to the appearance in 1961 of the Fantastic Four, a group of improbable characters created by the venerable Marvel Comics group out of sheer boredom with run-of-the-paper-mill superheroes.

"But you can't understand the Marvel thing without knowing a little comics history," Miss La Chapelle said, patiently tutoring a Clark Kent type who had only *read* the things, not *pondered* them. Comic books were unknowingly in a golden era during World War II and early postwar years, she explained. Superheroes multiplied by the dozens, coined in imitation of Superman (first appearance in Action Comics No. 1, June 1938) and Batman (a few months later). From the beginning, knowledgeable readers preferred National Comics (Batman, Wonder Woman, Superman, etc.) and the Marvel Group, owners of Captain America, the Human Torch and Sub-Mariner.

Fawcett's Captain Marvel (no relation to the Marvel Group) also scored a brief success before he was successfully sued by Superman, whose copyright owners charged plagiarism. "Cap's days were numbered anyway," Sam sighed. "He was undoubtedly the stupidest superhero in history. And toward the end he was so musclebound he looked like a great big red cheese." The comic book industry went into a slump after the war ended. Out-of-work superheroes, shorn of their roles as saviors of the Allies, twiddled their superthumbs as circulation dropped. Captain America, the last of a breed, ground to a halt in 1949, his wartime heroism forgotten.

Comic book writers and editors, desperate for plots, turned to the eternal themes of sex and horror, but the 1954 Comics Code rang down the curtain on *that* ploy, and comicdom entered its Dark Ages. "But always there was Stan Lee, doing fine things," Miss La Chapelle sighed in the tone ordinarily reserved for descriptions of Scott Fitzgerald's last days in Hollywood. Impressed by her admiration, we contacted the great man himself.

Lee, editor of the Marvel Group, began writing comics in 1941. But it was not until he and his artists created the Fantastic Four two decades later that his unsung labor was rewarded. "Name any period you want after the war, and comics people would rather forget it," Lee said, wincing at the memory. "The late '40s, the early '50s, the late '50s—we were starving. The industry was in a turmoil. For a while, Westerns would sell, and everybody would turn out Westerns. Then it would be love stories for six months. Nobody knew where they were going."

Then, in the monumental month of November 1961, *Fantastic Four* (by its own admission "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine") appeared on the stands. "For years we had been producing comics for kids, because they were supposed to be the market," Lee explained. "One day, out of sheer boredom, we said—let's do something *we* would like. So we tried to get rid of the old cliches. Comics were too predictable. Why not accept the premise that the superhero has his superpower, and

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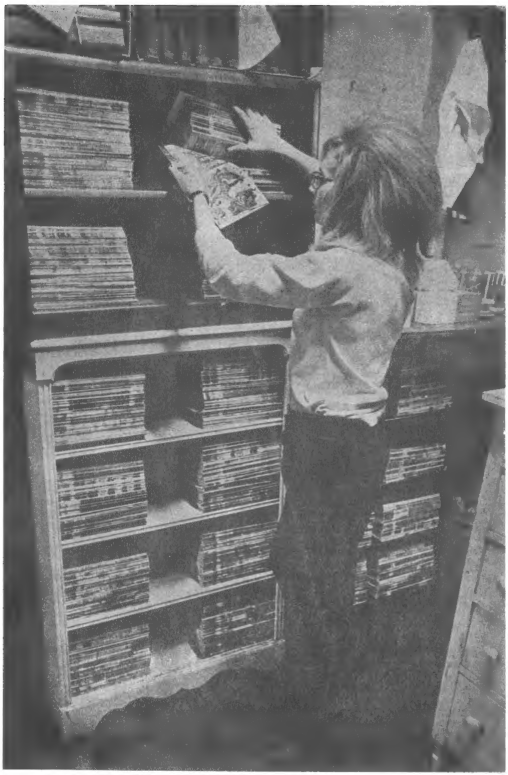

ADDING to files, Miss La Chapelle invests in future. Even fairly recent comics carry $1-and-up price tags.

MAN BEHIND the comic book renaissance is Stan Lee, editor of the Marvel Comics Group. Called "the Homer of the 20th Century" by campus comic fans, he created the new breed of superheroes like Spiderman and the Fantastic Four.

If writing intelligent comics qualifies as an industry first, so do some other Marvel breakthroughs. Lee was the first comics editor to integrate his books, and now Negro superheroes like Gabriel Jones and the Black Panther stalk wrongdoers in partnership with old established firms like the Avengers, X-Men and the Fantastic Four. The bad guys in Marvel Comics have also taken on a contemporary tinge. Cigar-smoking hoods and prehensile Nazis, the stock enemies of the war era, have been replaced by organizations like the Serpents, whose members spout a far-right-wing line and want to rid America of "foreigners".

Identifying with Lee's approach, some 50,000 college students have sent in $1 to become card-carrying members of the Merry Marvel Marching Society. Marchers receive an insider's newsletter describing the doings of Marvel's bullpen, and can also order sweat shirts and T-shirts with their favorite superheroes on them (top sellers: the Hulk and the

Continued on next pages

then keep everything else as realistic as possible? If I were Spiderman, for example, wouldn't I still have romantic problems, financial problems, sinus attacks and fits of insecurity? Wouldn't I be a little embarrassed about appearing in public in a costume? We decided to let our superheroes live in the real world."

The formula clicked, and Marvel developed a stable of superheroes. Some of them, like Spiderman, the Fantastic Four and the Incredible Hulk, were new. Others, like Captain America and the Human Torch, were resurrected. All were given problems: Daredevil is blind, Spiderman is a college student who feels inadequate to handle personal relationships, and the Thing is in love but feels insecure because he looks . . . well, like a Thing.

"What we were doing," Lee said, "was creating fairy tales for adults. I think we were the ones really responsible for the pop art bit. College students started reading our books back in 1961, and eventually the word got around that comic books were popular again. But the average newspaper feature writer didn't read comic books, and so what books did he think of? Batman and Superman. But only kids read Batman and Superman. Marvels are for intelligent people."

EVEN SOMEONE LIKE J. JONAH JAMESON WOULD HAVE TO TREAT ME WITH RESPECT!
I'LL HAVE YOUR PRESCRIPTION IN A FEW MINUTES, PETER!
TAKE YOUR TIME, MR. WILSON! I'VE A LOT OF THINKING TO DO!
NOBODY CAN SEND ME OUT ON A MISSION WHEN I SHOULD BE HOME STUDYING, OR LOOKING AFTER AUNT MAY!
IF AUNT MAY EVER LEARNED THAT I'M SPIDER-MAN, THE SHOCK MIGHT KILL HER!
AND, IF I JOIN THE AVENGERS, IT MIGHT BE HARDER THAN EVER TO KEEP MY SECRET--
--BECAUSE I'D BE MORE IN THE PUBLIC EYE THAN EVER!
RATS! WHO NEEDED A PROBLEM LIKE THIS?!!
JUST WHEN THINGS WERE BEGINNING TO LOOK UP FOR ME!
FINALLY GOT MY CYCLE--
THE KIDS AT SCHOOL SEEM TO BE GETTING FRIENDLIER--
I THOUGHT I REALLY HAD IT MADE!
MIRACLY--
THANK YOU, PETER!
BUT, YOU LOOK TIRED, DEAR!
'FRAID I AM, AUNT MAY!
I'LL GO TO MY ROOM FOR A WHILE!

UNLIKE earlier superheroes, Lee's characters have personal problems and fits of depression. This sequence shows Peter Parker (secret identity Spiderman) pondering an offer to join the Avengers, top Marvel superhero team.

COMICS Continued

Thing). Five of the Marvel characters now have their own TV show on Ch. 9 and some 50 other stations.

For the past three years, the Marvel superheroes have been hot sellers on campuses. One Hyde Park bookstore, which doesn't sell any other comics, advertises in the Chicago Maroon that all 10 Marvel titles are available each month as a $1.20 package deal, sold in a plain brown wrapper. As the author of all the Marvel plots, Lee himself has become something of a campus folk hero. He has spoken at New York University, Princeton, Bard, Columbia and Vassar, and next April 27 he will speak at the University of Chicago.

All of which is music to the ears of Miss La Chapelle and her fellow comicologists. "The comic book business is booming right now," she said. "I'll give you an example. Almost any title published before 1944 is rare, because nobody thought of saving comics and the wartime scrap paper drives consumed millions of issues. As a result, four years

BUT, ONCE THE DOOR CLOSES BEHIND HIM--
I CAN'T FIGHT IT ANY LONGER!
I'VE GOT TO FOLLOW MY OWN DESTINY--
--AND LET THE CHIPS FALL WHERE THEY MAY!
WHAT'S HAPPENED WITH HIS? I'VE DEFEATED SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL FOREIGN MENACES OF ALL TIME--WITHOUT BATTING AN EYE!
BUT, WHY DO I HAVE SUCH TROUBLE--JUST MANAGING MY OWN CAREER?
NEXT: LIZARD CRAWLS AGAIN!

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ago the first appearance of Batman in Detective Comics No. 27 brought $25 in mint condition, and that was a good price. Today, it's worth $100 to $125 and you can't find anybody who will sell." Recently, a Chicago area collector paid Acme $200 for the first five issues of Batman. Issues 6 through 10 are still in the company vault.

FLASH GORDON